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*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

## **Education and Training Inspectorate**

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

**Bocombra Primary School  
Portadown**

**Inspected: October 2009**

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 SCHOOL CONTEXT

Bocombra Primary School is a controlled school which is situated on the Old Lurgan Road in Portadown. The enrolment has increased steadily in recent years and currently stands at 278. Most of the children come from the immediate area. At the time of the inspection 3% of the children were entitled to free school meals and 13% of the children were identified as requiring help with aspects of their learning. There were 34 children with English as an additional language (EAL) in the school.

### 1.2 FOCUS

The inspection focused on:

- the children's achievements and standards in literacy and numeracy;
- the quality of provision for learning; and
- the quality of leadership and management.

In addition, the use of information and communication technology (ICT) to support learning, and the school's arrangements for pastoral care, including child protection were evaluated.

### 1.3 THE VIEWS OF THE PARENTS, TEACHERS, GOVERNORS, SUPPORT STAFF AND CHILDREN

The arrangements for the inspection included the opportunity for the parents, the teachers and support staff to complete a confidential questionnaire prior to the inspection, as well as meetings with representatives from the Board of Governors (governors) and a group of children from year 6.

Of the 100 questionnaires issued to the parents; 63 (63%) were returned to the Department of Education (DE), including 26 which contained an additional written comment. Most of the responses indicated a high level of satisfaction with the provision in the school. In particular, the parents valued the safe learning environment, the high standards set for the children in all aspects of school life and the dedicated Principal, teaching and support staff. The small number of concerns that were raised by the parents have been discussed with the governors and the Principal.

All 12 teachers and five support staff completed the questionnaire. They were wholly supportive of the Principal and of the work of the school.

The governors expressed strong appreciation for the work of the school; in particular they praised the recently appointed Principal for his commitment to the work of the school and the professionalism of all the staff, who work well together as a team.

In discussions held with the year 6 children, they talked appreciatively about the range of extra-curricular activities and educational visits provided for them, the work of the ECO-Schools committee and the welcome given to new children. They also indicated that they feel happy in school and know what to do if they have any worries about their safety.

## 1.4 PASTORAL CARE

The quality of the pastoral care in the school is good. The strengths include the caring and supportive ethos, the very well-behaved and courteous children, the effective inclusion of the children with EAL and the contribution made by the support staff to the children's well-being and learning experiences. The school has appropriately identified the development of a school council as a priority for the next school year in order to involve the children in the school's decision-making processes.

The school's provision for pastoral care could be further enhanced through the development of the taught pastoral programme and the evaluation of the effectiveness of the pastoral care policies in the classroom.

## 1.5 CHILD PROTECTION

The school has comprehensive arrangements in place for safeguarding children; these arrangements reflect the guidance issued by DE but the following area needs to be addressed:

- the roles of the deputy designated teachers need to be made more explicit for the children.

## 1.6 HEALTHY EATING/PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

The school gives good attention to promoting healthy eating and physical activity. The staff encourage the children to adopt healthy lifestyles through, for example, the promotion of healthy breaks, the extra-curricular activities and the class of the month award for healthy eating.

## 1.7 LINKS WITH PARENTS AND THE LOCAL COMMUNITY

The links with parents and the local community are given a high priority within the school. There is an active Parent Teacher Association which has raised considerable funds to supplement the school's resources; the parents' opinions are valued and there is good communication with them about their children's progress, school events, policies and procedures. There are good links with the local churches, post-primary schools and some of the pre-school settings from which the children come.

# 2. ACHIEVEMENTS AND STANDARDS

## 2.1 LEARNING

The children are well motivated to learn; they are highly co-operative and, when given the opportunity, are keen to talk about their learning. In the best practice there is an appropriate emphasis on promoting independent thinking and learning; the children are actively engaged in the learning process, have opportunities to interact effectively with one another and to apply their learning in a variety of contexts. This good practice should be disseminated and further developed throughout the school.

At foundation stage (FS), the children learn through a range of well planned play-based and formal activities. Whilst the children are well settled and making some progress, there is a need for the teachers to take greater account of the children's pre-school experience and knowledge in order to optimise their progress and to more effectively meet their individual learning needs. It will also be important to ensure that the parents are fully aware of how they can support their children's learning.

Most of the children make good progress in their learning and by the end of key stage (KS) 2 their standards in literacy and numeracy are good. Whilst the standards achieved by the children at the end of KS1 are satisfactory, the school has appropriately identified the need to increase the numbers of children attaining higher levels in both literacy and numeracy.

An analysis of the KS2 assessment data over the past four years shows that in English and mathematics, the school's performance is consistently above the NI average. Compared with schools in a similar free school meals category, the levels of attainment in English and mathematics are in line with the average.

## 2.2 ENGLISH AND LITERACY

The quality of provision for English and literacy is good. The literacy co-ordinator is providing good leadership. She has made a good start to ensuring there is a more consistent and systematic approach to reading and writing across the school. Literacy has been identified as a priority for improvement in the school development plan (SDP) and the school has adopted the Southern Education and Library Board's Literacy Framework to provide a sound foundation for developing Literacy.

In the FS and KS1, the children's talking and listening skills are developed through the use of activities such as play-based learning and shared reading sessions. By the end of KS1, the children are able to communicate their ideas clearly and confidently. At KS2, the development of the children's talking and listening skills takes place across the curriculum. There is a need for the school to develop a more focused programme for talking and listening in order to ensure that there is ample progression and challenge from FS to the end of KS2.

The school has introduced a systematic approach to reading, which includes shared, guided and independent reading. They have adopted agreed phonics and spelling programmes and have invested significantly in commercial reading schemes, fiction and non-fiction materials.

As a result of a reading survey carried out with the children, the staff have introduced a number of initiatives, such as book fairs, in order to promote reading for enjoyment. It will be important for the school to evaluate how effective these initiatives are in raising the children's levels of attainment.

By the end of KS2, most of the children can read fluently and they possess good standards of comprehension.

The school has adopted a well-organised and coherent approach to the development of writing. Individual whiteboards, writing frames and play-based learning activities are used to support early writing. By the end of KS1, nearly all of the children can express their ideas coherently and they can develop their thoughts and ideas using paragraphs. As they progress through KS2, the children have the opportunity to write in a range of contexts that includes the use of creative, instructional, descriptive, and biographical forms and they are given sufficient time and support to plan, draft, and edit their work. They use dictionaries independently to check for spelling and meaning and the presentation of their written work is good.

Information and communication technology (ICT) is used effectively to encourage the children to research their work and to provide effective guidance for writing.

## 2.3 MATHEMATICS AND NUMERACY

The overall quality of provision in mathematics is good.

The co-ordination of numeracy has been carried out in a temporary capacity for a significant period of time. The temporary co-ordinator is enthusiastic and knowledgeable about the numeracy curriculum; as a result of a recent book analysis she has identified a few appropriate areas for whole-school development. She has also identified the need to develop further the monitoring procedures in order to evaluate the quality of learning and teaching in this area more effectively. It is essential that permanent arrangements are put in place for co-ordinating this important area of the curriculum

There is a comprehensive policy and programme in place to guide the teachers in their planning and practice. The programme clearly outlines the learning intentions for each area of the mathematics curriculum, the line of progression for each topic and the mathematical language to be developed. This long term plan needs to be more effectively and consistently translated into the teachers' medium and short term planning in order to maintain a clear focus on the learning. The policy and programme need to be updated to reflect the ethos and language of the Northern Ireland Curriculum (NIC).

Each of the mathematics lessons observed during the inspection incorporated a mental mathematics activity. The most effective of these activities were practical, appropriately challenging and provided the children with opportunities to use mathematical language to articulate their thinking processes. In the less effective sessions, the activities focused on low level operations and the pace was too slow.

In the most effective practice in the FS, the children's knowledge and understanding are consolidated and extended through well planned play-based activities, practical mathematics lessons, games and action songs. This good practice needs to be shared within and beyond the FS.

As the children progress through KS1 and KS2 they continue to develop their understanding in all aspects of the mathematics curriculum. In the most effective lessons observed the teachers had high expectations of what the children could achieve; they modelled effective questioning to promote thinking and invited the children to formulate their own questions. The children were encouraged to think flexibly, to make decisions about their preferred system for working, to choose the resources they needed to complete tasks and to select the level of challenge best suited to them. In the less effective lessons, there was insufficient challenge and differentiation to meet the range of needs within the class.

During the inspection the majority of the teachers made effective use of ICT to support learning and teaching across the curriculum; good use was made of the interactive whiteboards to motivate the children and consolidate their learning; throughout the school the children had the opportunity to use the interactive white boards in a variety of meaningful contexts. The year 7 children have successfully participated in the Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment ICT Accreditation Scheme. The year 5 children have entered the 'Dissolving Boundaries' programme; this will provide them with the opportunity to enhance their ICT skills further and to develop valuable cross-community links.

### **3. THE QUALITY OF PROVISION FOR LEARNING**

#### **3.1 PLANNING**

The teachers plan their work conscientiously. The short term plans for literacy identify clearly the intended learning outcomes for the children, the learning activities, resources and assessment strategies to be used. This good practice should be applied to planning in mathematics and be further developed to identify more explicitly how the teachers plan to meet the differentiated needs of all the children. In the best practice the teachers complete effective evaluations of the quality and extent of the children's learning; these evaluations are appropriately used to inform future planning.

#### **3.2 TEACHING**

During the inspection the quality of most of the teaching observed was good or better. The teachers are dedicated, hard-working and they have created well organised classrooms to facilitate the children's learning. In the best practice observed there was a clear focus on learning. The teachers made good use of the learning intentions throughout the lesson to focus the children's attention and to consolidate their learning; they built effectively on the children's previous knowledge and used skilful questioning to stimulate the children's thinking and to extend their understanding. In these lessons good support was provided for those children with special educational needs. In the less effective lessons, there was a lack of pace, the learning activities were insufficiently matched to the varied needs and abilities of the children and there was over-direction by the teacher.

#### **3.3 ASSESSMENT**

The teachers mark the children's written work regularly. In the majority of cases the marking is of a supportive nature. In the best practice, the teachers are beginning to implement assessment for learning strategies and to advise the children on how to improve the quality of their work. This good practice should be shared, further developed and applied more consistently throughout the school.

The teachers' assessment of the children's learning is appropriately supplemented by the use of a wide range of standardised tests; the school has begun to use this quantitative data in setting targets to raise the achievements of individual children, for benchmarking and for whole school target setting in literacy and numeracy. There is a need for this process to be further embedded and for the co-ordinators and staff to have a clear understanding of how the data might also be used to identify appropriate priorities for whole school development.

The parents are kept well informed of their children's progress through parental interviews and annual written reports.

#### **3.4 SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS**

The Principal and special educational needs (SEN) teacher have formed a good working partnership and share the Special Education Needs Co-ordinator role. They are well organised, have clear lines of responsibility and have developed very good working relationships across the school. The school staff, including classroom assistants and ancillary staff, show commitment to achieving the best for those children with SEN and, in addition, to ensuring that the diverse needs of those children with EAL are understood and met. The SEN teacher has created a warm, safe and nurturing ethos in the SEN withdrawal sessions; the children learn in an atmosphere of respect and they all achieve well. The SEN



teacher communicates effectively with the class teachers who, in turn, show understanding and knowledge about the children and their families. The quality of teaching in the withdrawal sessions is very good and across the school there is good quality teaching for the 41 children on the special needs register. The recent refurbishment of the SEN accommodation has been of great benefit to the provision.

#### **4. LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT**

##### **4.1 LEADERSHIP**

Due to natural progression, the school has had three changes of Principal within the past ten years. The current Principal has been in post for sixteen months. He is energetic, enthusiastic and sets high standards for all aspects of the school's provision; he has a very good rapport with the children, provides good leadership and is effectively promoting a collegial approach to school development and decision making. He is willingly supported by the hard working Vice-principal.

The recently formed Management Team has appropriately identified the need to develop the generic role of the co-ordinator and to provide training for the senior and middle management teams. The inspection team endorse these as key priorities for the continued development of the school.

##### **4.2 PLANNING FOR IMPROVEMENT**

The school has carried out extensive consultation with the parents, teachers and children; the outcomes from these consultations have been used effectively to inform planning for the school's development in areas such as pastoral care, reporting and provision for reading. The School Management Team has identified the need to develop further the monitoring procedures within the school in order to evaluate strategically the quality of the learning and teaching and to more fully inform the school development planning process. The school development plan is compliant with the Department of Education School Development Plan Regulations/Schedule 2005/19.

##### **4.3 ACCOMMODATION**

The school has had a major refurbishment within the past two years; it is bright, spacious and maintained to an excellent standard. The accommodation is not sufficient, however, to meet the growing enrolment demands of the local area; one of the year 1 classes is currently being taught within a resource area. Whilst every effort has been made to maximise the potential of this area, it is an unsatisfactory long-term arrangement.

##### **4.4 RESOURCES, FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT AND GOVERNANCE**

The school is very well resourced to support learning and teaching in most areas of the Northern Ireland Curriculum. The resources are well maintained, easily accessible and fit for purpose.

The governors have a clear understanding of the school's priorities and challenges. They are very supportive of the Principal and take an active role in the financial management of the school.

## 5. CONCLUSION

### 5.1 The strengths of the school include:

- the well behaved and courteous children;
- the caring and supportive ethos which is characterised by the good working relationships at all levels and the significant contributions of the non-teaching staff;
- the effective inclusion of the children with English as an additional language and the good provision for the children with special needs, in particular those receiving extra withdrawal support;
- the good or better quality of teaching in most of the lessons observed;
- the good standards of literacy and numeracy achieved by the children by the end of KS2; and
- the clear direction and leadership shown by the Principal.

### 5.2 An area for improvement is:

- the need to focus self-evaluation more specifically on learning and teaching in order to promote improvement and to raise further the children's levels of attainment in literacy and numeracy, particularly at KS1.

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

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