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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



INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

Education and Training Inspectorate

Report of a Focused Inspection

**Bunscoil an Traonaigh
Lisnaskea**

Inspected: May 2007

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Bunscoil an Traonaigh is situated on the outskirts of Lisnaskea in County Fermanagh. The children who attend the school come from the town itself and from the outlying rural areas of Brookeborough, Donagh and Roslea. The school's enrolment stands currently at 22. Forty-one per cent of the children are entitled to receive free school meals.

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 a group of children from year 3. Eighteen questionnaires were issued to the parents; 44% were returned to the Department of Education (DE) and two contained additional written comments. The responses from the parental questionnaires indicated that the parents appreciate the work of the school and the governors expressed their support for the ongoing development and expansion of the school. The children talked enthusiastically about the many aspects of school that they enjoy and report that they feel safe and happy in school. The Education and Training Inspectorate (Inspectorate) has provided the Principal and a group of governors with feedback from the questionnaires and the discussions.

1.3 The school has a few strengths in its provision for pastoral care and child protection but there are important areas for further improvement which require prompt action to ensure that the procedures are fully in line with the guidance outlined in the relevant DE Circulars. These include the need to ensure that:

- all members of staff are vetted;
- there is further consultation with the staff, children and parents when revising pastoral policies; and
- the arrangements for pastoral care and child protection are made known directly to parents at least once every two years.

1.4 The programme for the promotion of a whole-school approach to healthy eating has a few strengths; these include healthy breaks and water provision. The children, however, demonstrate a basic understanding of the importance of making healthy life choices and a much stronger focus needs to be placed on providing more opportunities for physical activity. An assessment of the nature and quality of the arrangements for health and well-being practices within the school should be included in the school development plan (SDP) to comply with statutory regulations.

1.5 The inspection focused on literacy in Irish, including the contribution of information and communication technology (ICT) in supporting literacy, the provision for special educational needs (SEN), and on the school's arrangements for pastoral care, including child protection and health and well-being.

2. THE QUALITY OF THE CHILDREN'S WORK

2.1 The children are friendly and welcoming; they co-operate well with one another and are well-behaved. The quality of the working relationships between the children and their teachers is good. The teachers have created an attractive and supportive learning environment in the classrooms which includes samples of the children's art work and writing on display, as well as important language support materials.

2.2 There is a strong sense of community and good team-spirit developed among the teachers and all concerned with the school, and, in particular, with the adjoining pre-school. Communication with the parents is developing gradually and they receive regular information about homework and the topics under study.

2.3 There are variations in the quality of the teaching. The best practice is characterised by effective classroom management, sound planning and a well-judged pace. The teachers use a variety of resources and the children are engaged in a range of meaningful and challenging activities. In the less effective practice, the children have limited opportunities for independent work and, at times, they are inattentive and off task.

2.4 The teachers have developed monthly and six-weekly planning formats which guide their work in important areas of the curriculum. It will be important to add more detail to the schemes of work, to ensure more consistency of approach and to specify more clearly the intended learning outcomes.

2.5 The play sessions observed during the inspection were well managed and took into account the children's learning in other parts of the curriculum. The children followed clear routines, were engaged well in the activities and worked with enjoyment. The adult interaction was particularly effective in developing the children's language.

2.6 The teachers have placed much emphasis in the development of the children's oral skills and they provide a wide range of opportunities for talking and listening. The children speak confidently and respond with enthusiasm to the teachers and classroom assistant. Many are beginning to speak using extended language; a feature of this work is the good level of spoken Irish acquired by the children, and, on many occasions, their informal and spontaneous use of the Irish language. The children are taught to read using several commercial reading schemes. Effective use is made of 'Big Books' for shared reading, and sessions of group reading are used to provide for the children's individual differences in ability. In these sessions, the children participate well and they are making progress commensurate with their abilities.

2.7 A sound start is made to writing in the early years and the children have a few opportunities for independent writing in year 2. There are, however, limited opportunities for extended writing in year 3 and there is scope for the children to produce more personal work, based on their own experiences and using their own words. It will be important for the teachers to introduce a more balanced programme across the three language skills.

2.8 The school has identified the need to develop ICT more fully in order to enrich the children's learning experiences and to support the promotion of dual literacy. Information and communication technology is used well with the older children to consolidate language work and to build vocabulary. It will be necessary for the school to acquire more resources and to plan to integrate ICT more fully into learning and teaching.

2.9 The accommodation comprises currently one temporary classroom and a room in the adjacent Wildfowl Sanctuary used by the year 3 children. This arrangement is undesirable and temporary; the governors hope to address this situation and plans are advanced to secure new premises for the new school year.

2.10 Bunscoil an Traonaigh, established in 2004, is a relatively new school. The current staff are in their first year in the school. The Principal has developed a suitable range of important whole-school policies and action plans to guide the work of the school. In addition to carrying out a wide range of administrative duties, the Principal teaches a composite class, acts as special educational needs co-ordinator (SENCO) and has responsibility for numeracy. She is released one day per week to attend to whole-school development issues; the school reports, however, that this arrangement is not always possible as there are difficulties maintaining regular and consistent substitute cover in order to release the Principal from teaching. It will be important that the Principal receives ongoing support to deal effectively with the combination of challenges and strategic direction required for the school as it develops.

3. CONCLUSION

3.1 The strengths of the school include:

- the friendly and welcoming children;
- the distinctive ethos based on the Irish-medium immersion;
- the good working relationships between the teachers and the children;
- the spontaneous and informal use of good quality Irish by most of the children;
- the strong sense of community that permeates the school;
- the committed and hard-working Principal; and
- the ongoing development of whole-school policies.

3.2 The areas for improvement include the need:

- to comply more fully with the DE Circulars, in particular, with regard to the vetting of teachers;
- to focus more sharply on raising the standards of the children's written work; and

- to develop strategies to monitor the work of the school and to provide more strategic direction as the school grows in size.

3.3 In the areas inspected, the school has a few strengths in its educational and pastoral provision. The inspection has identified important areas for improvement which need to be addressed promptly if the school is to meet effectively, the needs of all the learners.

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

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