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*The Education and Training Inspectorate -
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**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 tSléibhe Dhuibh
Belfast**

Inspected: October 2008

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1. INTRODUCTION

SCHOOL CONTEXT

1.1 Bunscoil an tSléibhe Dhuibh is situated in the Ballymurphy Road in west Belfast. The school was established in 1993 and moved to a new school building in January 2005. The children come mainly from the immediate vicinity of the school. Thirty-nine percent of the children are entitled to free school meals. Almost 17% of the children are registered as having special educational needs. In September 2008, the school admitted the pupils from a neighbouring Irish-medium primary school which was closing; most of these pupils have formed a year 4 to year 6 composite class. The year 1 intake number for the last few years has been steady.

FOCUS

1.2 The focus of the inspection was on the quality of the work in English/literacy and mathematics and Irish.

THE VIEWS OF THE PARENTS, TEACHERS, GOVERNORS AND CHILDREN

1.3 The arrangements for the inspection included the opportunity for the parents and the teaching 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 the children from year 6. One hundred and thirty-eight questionnaires were issued to parents and approximately 43% of these were returned to the Department of Education (DE). Twenty-two returns contained additional written comments. Almost all of the responses indicated high levels of satisfaction with the provision in the school and support for all aspects of the work of the school. In particular, the parents and governors valued the school's welcoming ethos, the approachability of the staff and the support offered by the teachers to parents in helping their children to succeed. In addition, they commended the dedication and commitment of the Principal. Six of the teachers completed the on-line questionnaire and their responses are very positive. The children in year 6 spoke very positively about their experiences in school. They reported that they feel safe, and know whom to turn to in the event of a concern. The views of the parents and the teachers have been shared with the Principal and the governors.

PASTORAL CARE

1.4 The quality of the arrangements for pastoral care in the school is very good. The school is characterised by its warm and inclusive ethos. The atmosphere is supportive and friendly, and the relationships at all levels are mutually respectful. The staff, teaching and non-teaching, are hard-working and dedicated; they promote strongly a positive climate of pastoral care and concern for the children, ensuring the creation of a safe and secure environment in which the children feel at ease. The children are well-mannered and welcoming to visitors. They are courteous and display exemplary standards of behaviour. Good efforts are made to ensure that the learning environment in the classrooms and corridors is attractive. The bright displays in the classrooms and in the corridors throughout the school celebrate the children's work, record their activities and achievements and provide a supportive environment for learning and teaching. The quality of the cleaning and caretaking is very good.

CHILD PROTECTION

1.5 The school has very good, comprehensive arrangements in place for safeguarding children. These arrangements reflect the guidance issued in the relevant DE 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.

HEALTHY EATING AND PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

1.6 The school gives very good attention to promoting healthy eating and physical activity. The popular breakfast club and fruit in school programme encourage the children to adopt healthy lifestyles.

LINKS WITH PARENTS

1.7 The school encourages and enjoys the strong support of the parents. Communication between school and home is clear and helps the parents to understand more about the school, to know how their children are progressing and to learn how they might help them. The school offers a range of curriculum meetings and workshops to provide the parents with information about the work their children are doing in school and to develop the skills they need to support their children's learning.

OTHER LINKS

1.8 The children's experiences are enriched through a range of extra-curricular activities. Good use is made by the school and the community of the nearby multi-use games area. The children's learning and social development are enhanced through regular visits to places of educational interest. Links have been established with schools, both locally through the Schools' Community Relations Programme, as well as internationally through the Comenius programme. A group of parents, who came together initially to raise funds for the school, has developed and is working very effectively to provide activities and programmes for the wider community.

2. ACHIEVEMENTS AND STANDARDS

LEARNING

2.1 In general, the children are well-motivated and have a positive attitude to their learning. They are attentive and settle well to their work. They have opportunities to engage in whole-class and small group work, and to work independently; they co-operate well with one another and with their teachers. The teachers need to provide additional opportunities to develop the children's thinking skills and their understanding to ensure learning is promoted in a sustained, progressive manner. By the end of key stage (KS) 2, the majority of children have a mature attitude to their work and make good progress in their learning.

ENGLISH AND LITERACY

2.2 Under the guidance of the literacy co-ordinator the school has agreed and implemented a literacy strategy with very useful schemes for phonics, reading, writing, spelling and punctuation in both Irish and English. English is introduced informally during the first term of year 3 and formally from the second term of year 3. Information and communication technology (ICT) is used well as a platform to extend the children's experiences in literacy. The literacy co-ordinator and the teachers have developed a range of literacy initiatives and have participated on a number of pilot schemes in collaboration with external agencies.

2.3 The children are confident and competent in their use of computers to support their work. The school has demonstrated its commitment to the use of ICT by allocating substantial resources to augment those provided through the C2K managed service. These additional resources include interactive whiteboards which are now located in every classroom. During the inspection, some very effective lessons were observed in both key stages in which this technology, as well as the mobile laptop computers, provided extension and challenge for the children.

2.4 There is a good emphasis on the development of the children's oral skills. They listen attentively to each other and their teachers. In the foundation stage (FS), teachers use traditional and modern rhymes and stories to stimulate the children; they use good questioning techniques to encourage the children to discuss plots and characters and to express their thoughts and feelings. Children are encouraged to take time to think before responding. They are encouraged to talk about their experiences at home and in school. This work is developed further throughout KS 1 and KS 2. By the end of KS 2, the children discuss a wide range of contemporary issues in Irish and in English; many are able to make sustained contributions. During the course of the inspection the children in year 7 took part very effectively in a video-conference with pupils from an English-medium post-primary school.

2.5 Reading is taught systematically and effectively. In the early years, the teachers use a commercial graded reading scheme in Irish which they supplement with photocopied material; some of the photocopied resources used are in poor condition. Formal reading in English is also introduced through a commercial scheme and the children make good progress transferring the skills first developed in Irish. The school has introduced phonics schemes in Irish and in English to provide a consistent approach to the development of the children's word-attack skills. Strategies such as shared, guided, modelled and independent reading are employed appropriately to extend the children's experiences and improve their reading ability. The children enjoy reading, and talk with enthusiasm about what they have read. By the end of KS 2, the children achieve good standards in reading in line with their abilities.

2.6 The children's early writing is appropriately based on their personal experiences. As the children progress through the school, they are introduced to a range of writing stimuli including the environment, novels, current affairs, newspapers, magazines and appropriate interactive activities. By year 7, the examples of the children's personal writing include poetry, letter writing, book reviews, descriptions, stories and reports. In a number of classes, there is evidence of unnecessary whole-class transcription in the children's books which

highlights a lack of appropriate differentiation on occasions, as well as some missed opportunities to extend the children's independent writing across the curriculum. The children's standards in writing by the end of KS 2 are good and generally in line with their abilities.

MATHEMATICS AND NUMERACY

2.7 The school has a whole-school scheme for mathematics to guide the teachers' individual 6-weekly planning. Lines of progression are clearly laid out with associated learning intentions and skills to be developed. In the FS and KS 1, the children's learning in mathematics is consolidated through the use of practical activities. The children have a good range of learning experiences, including mathematical games and competitions. In KS 2, the children enjoy the mental mathematics activities; they have a good range of mathematical experiences and they are confident to talk about and explain their mental processes. By the end of KS 2, the standards achieved in mathematics are very good.

3. THE QUALITY OF PROVISION FOR LEARNING

PLANNING

3.1 The teachers are conscientious in their planning for lessons and co-operate closely with one another to make detailed 6-weekly plans for their classes to ensure consistency, consolidation and progression. The whole-school policy for learning and teaching encourages teachers to take the children's different learning styles into account. Teachers plan in clusters and structures for monitoring and evaluating are well embedded. Planning is informed well by thorough analysis of all the available evidence.

TEACHING

3.2 The quality of teaching observed during the inspection ranged from satisfactory to very good. In most of the lessons it was good or very good. In the best practice, the work was well paced, imaginative and interesting and was matched closely to the needs and abilities of the children within the class. The intended learning outcomes were shared with the children at the beginning, and at the end of lessons there was review and consolidation of the learning. A suitable variety of teaching strategies was employed effectively, resources used creatively, and opportunities provided for the children to work independently or in small groups. Classroom assistants gave effective support in collaboration with the class teacher. The teachers used skilful questioning that developed the children's ability to give extended responses. They had high expectations of what the children could achieve. In a minority of lessons where there is some undue emphasis on routine tasks or the work is over-directed by the teacher, the pace of the lesson is slow and there is insufficient challenge for the more able children. There is a need to disseminate the very good practice that exists in the school to ensure consistency in the children's learning experiences.

ASSESSMENT

3.3 The teachers mark the children's work regularly, and often, written comments offer encouragement. Teachers are implementing assessment for learning strategies. The school recognises the need for teachers to develop further this area in order to more consistently provide guidance on how children can make improvements in their work. The school

provides the parents with a detailed written report on each child's progress and there are arrangements in place for formal parent and teacher consultations. The school collects a wide range of assessment data, which it is using effectively to identify performance trends and set appropriate targets for improving the standards achieved by all the children.

SPECIAL/ADDITIONAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS

3.4 The school gives a high priority to those children who require support with their learning and allocates a substantial resource to improving the children's learning. These children are identified at an early stage through the use of diagnostic tests and teachers' observations. The arrangements for identifying and recording individual needs are well documented and the policy provides clear guidance to teachers and assistants. Parents are kept well informed at all stages. The special educational needs co-ordinator has a clear vision for the development of special educational needs (SEN) provision which is firmly focused on the needs of the children, with a strong commitment to inclusion and equality. The targets in individual education plans are specific, reviewed regularly and are a useful guide to classroom practice.

3.5 Additional help in literacy is provided through periods of individual and small-group withdrawal from classes. This extra support is of a very high quality and is linked effectively to the children's work in class through careful and regular liaison with the class teachers. The school also provides extra support in numeracy for those children who have difficulties in this area. A measure of the success of the SEN provision is the movement of children off the register following the support provided. Valuable links are developing with officers of the Curriculum Advisory Support Service to support learning and teaching. The provision for the children with special educational needs is a strength of the school.

4. LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

LEADERSHIP

4.1 The Principal has a clear vision for the school, fosters a team approach to ongoing school development and is well-supported by the Vice-principal. He manages the school efficiently and provides thoughtful and effective leadership. He demonstrates a strong commitment to the children's well-being and to school improvement. He has built on the strengths of the staff and works with them to set realistically high expectations for the school and for the children. The subject co-ordinators have an important role in monitoring and evaluating the work in their subject areas.

PLANNING FOR IMPROVEMENT

4.2 The Principal, in consultation with the Vice-principal, has worked with the staff to prepare a comprehensive set of aims and whole-school policies. The school has an appropriate school development plan (SDP) which sets out clearly the school's priorities. There are excellent opportunities for consultation about the SDP across the whole school community. The school gives excellent attention to, and meets fully, the requirements of the School Development Plans Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2005.

STAFF DEVELOPMENT

4.3 Staff development is an important priority for the school. The teachers have attended a range of suitable internal and external in-service training (INSET) courses to support them in their work. Much of the school's INSET has been focused appropriately on the priorities for development, notably the revised Northern Ireland Curriculum.

5. CONCLUSION

5.1 The strengths of the school include:

- the excellent ethos and working relationships that exist at all levels;
- the hardworking and committed teachers who are dedicated to the education and pastoral care of the children;
- the high quality of the provision made for the children with special educational needs;
- the enthusiastic and highly effective leadership of the Principal, ably assisted by the Vice-principal, whose vision sets the tone for the work of the school;
- the school's approach to self-evaluation, development and improvement; and
- the strong support of the governors, the parents and the wider community.

5.2 In the areas inspected, the quality of education provided by this school is very good. The school is meeting very effectively the educational and pastoral needs of the children, and has demonstrated its capacity for sustained self-improvement.

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