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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

Cairncastle Primary School
Ballygally, Larne

Inspected: March 2007

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BASIC INFORMATION SHEET (BIS) - PRIMARY SCHOOLS

- A.
- School: Cairncastle Primary
Ballygally, Larne
 - School Reference Number: 301-6269
 - Date of Inspection: W/B 05.03.07
 - Nature of Inspection: FI/En/ICT

B.

School Year	2002/03	2003/04	2004/05	2005/06	2006/07
Year 1 Intake	13	19	19	15	18
Enrolments					
Primary	107	116	119	130	131
Reception	0	0	0	0	0
Nursery Class/Classes	0	0	0	0	0
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):

94.5%

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

5 0 0
 - PTR (Pupil/Teacher Ratio): 26.2 NI PTR: 20.5
 - Average Class Size: 26
 - Class Size (Range): 23 to 29
 - Ancillary Support:
Number of Hours **Per Week**:
 - Clerical support: 20
 - Official Making A Good
Start Support: 10
 - Additional hours of other
classroom assistant support: 55
 - Number of children with statements of special educational needs: 3
 - Number of children who are not of statutory school age: 0
 - Percentage of children entitled to free school meals: 4.5%

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Cairncastle Primary School is situated near the village of Ballygally in County Antrim. The majority of the children who attend the school live in the village or in the surrounding rural area. The school's enrolment has increased significantly in recent years and stands currently at 131. Approximately 4.5% of the children are entitled to receive free school meals; almost 8.5% have been identified as having special educational needs (SEN).

1.2 The inspection of the provision for pastoral care included the completion of questionnaires by the parents and a meeting with members of the Board of Governors (governors) of the school; in addition, an interview was held with a group of year 6 children. Approximately 53% of the parental questionnaires were returned and 20 included written comments; most of the responses were highly positive about the work of the school; all the comments made have been shared with the Principal. The governors expressed their strong support for the school, commenting, in particular, on the good leadership of the Principal, the strong family ethos of the school and its popularity in the local community.

1.3 There are many strengths in the quality of the arrangements for pastoral care and child protection. The school has procedures in place which comply with the guidance outlined in the relevant Department of Education Circulars; it has identified appropriately a few areas for improvement which it is currently implementing.

1.4 There is close liaison with the parents and the staff work hard to involve them in the life and work of the school. Communication with the parents is good and involves regular newsletters and informative letters. A parent-teacher group is well established and, in addition to fundraising, is becoming involved increasingly in the life of the school. The school should consider developing more fully ways of assisting the parents in supporting the education of their children.

1.5 The school's programme for the promotion of health and well-being has some sound features. Attention is given to the development and implementation of initiatives, such as healthier breaks and water provision, which encourage the children to adopt healthy lifestyles. There is an ongoing commitment to the promotion of healthy eating through class drama activities and by means of merits for children who bring healthy breaks to school. In order to comply with statutory regulations, an assessment of the nature and quality of the arrangements for health and well-being practices should be included in the school development plan (SDP). The children demonstrate a good understanding of the importance of making healthy life choices. Opportunities are provided for all the children to participate in a range of physical activities.

1.6 The inspection focused on the work in English, information and communication technology (ICT) and pastoral care, including the school's arrangements for child protection, health and well-being.

2. THE QUALITY OF THE CHILDREN'S WORK

2.1 The caring, courteous, friendly and inclusive atmosphere contributes to the positive ethos of the school; in addition, there are very good working relationships at all levels in the school. Good routines are well established throughout the school and there is an impressive sense of order. Most of the children display high standards of good behaviour; they settle well to their work and persevere with the tasks they are set; they display a strong commitment to learning; often, they listen attentively and co-operate readily with their teachers and with one another.

2.2 The teaching staff are conscientious in their preparation for lessons and work hard for all of the children. The quality of most of the teaching is good; however, in a minority of lessons there were important shortcomings. In the most effective lessons, the teachers engaged the children in worthwhile and challenging activities that were well matched to their needs; often the learning objectives shared with the children provided a clear structure and focus to the activities. A strong feature of the teaching was the good use by the teachers of imaginative and innovative resources; further, the support staff, guided by the teachers provided valuable and much valued assistance to the children. Some lessons, however, were less well timed and paced and there was insufficient challenge, variety and extension or consolidation activities for all of the children. To ensure greater consistency in learning and teaching, the teachers should review their approaches and share the good practice which already exists.

2.3 Although the school has not been involved in the Northern Ireland Literacy Strategy, it has incorporated some useful aspects of it into its programme for literacy.

2.4 The planning for literacy is good. The co-ordinator has devised a comprehensive policy and there are schemes of work and half-termly plans which provide guidance for the teachers. In addition, there is an appropriate action plan which sets out helpful priorities for development.

2.5 All of the children have opportunities to take part in talking and listening sessions in a variety of contexts across the curriculum. The younger children report back to their peers at the end of structured play. The older children ask and answer questions of one another through taking on the role of a character in the novels they are reading. They make presentations to the other children using ICT to highlight the key points. On a few occasions, the younger children required more time to articulate their thoughts before answering. It will be important for the teachers to develop more skilful questioning techniques to assist the children further in the development of their oral communication.

2.6 The teachers use a wide range of techniques and approaches to improve the children's reading. A new, commercial reading scheme has been introduced recently and this is supplemented by novel work in the key stage (KS) 2 classes. The younger children respond with enthusiasm to the stories they hear in the 'Big Book', and during structured activities they enjoy browsing the books available in the attractive

book corners in each classroom. The school has built up a comprehensive and varied stock of fiction and non-fiction books; these have raised the profile of reading among the children and they speak with interest about the novels they are reading. Intensive class and group novel approaches are used effectively with the older children. Most of the children attain satisfactory or better standards in their reading.

2.7 The school has introduced recently a phonics programme in the early years in order to provide a consistent approach to spelling and to develop the children's word attack skills. It will be important for the teachers to integrate this approach more meaningfully with the children's reading.

2.8 The older children have many opportunities to produce personal and independent pieces of extended written work; these include playscripts, poems and other forms of instructional and persuasive writing. There is scope for the children to respond more fully to the novels they read and to engage in meaningful activities linked to their reading. The progress of some of the younger children with their writing is slow. Science is well used for the promotion of writing and the children would benefit from similar approaches in other subjects, in particular, history and geography.

2.9 In the best practice, lessons had a clear focus and a common theme which facilitated the integration of the three skills of talking and listening, reading and writing. While the teacher worked with one group, the other children were engaged in meaningful, related writing activities. This good practice needs to become more widespread.

2.10 Information and communication technology is used well to support the development of the children's literacy throughout the school, and for the acquisition and reinforcement of new vocabulary and structures. The school has invested in the provision of whole-class presentation technologies, in particular interactive whiteboards. As a result, an increasing number of good examples of the use of ICT to enhance whole-class teaching were noted. In particular, in literacy lessons, the pupils' motivation and engagement were improved by the effective use and exploitation of digital texts which contained animation, and audio and video clips. This gave the older children the opportunity for shared reading experiences on-screen allowing them to make choices and to respond to the text in an interactive manner. Most of the children interacted well with the teacher and their peers; the use of this technology provided appropriate scope for them to develop their communication skills. There was good questioning from the teacher and extended responses from the pupils.

2.11 The school has identified structured play as an area for further development. The findings from the inspection confirm that the planned review is timely. There is a need to draw up an appropriate policy to embrace current curricular thinking and to develop the planning for structured play throughout KS1 in order to ensure a broad and balanced programme of play which progresses steadily and supports the children's learning across the curriculum. Further, the school should consider developing the outdoor area to extend the children's play and learning opportunities.

2.12 The school shows a strong commitment to providing support for the children identified as having special educational needs. It is appropriate that all of the teachers are beginning to develop suitable strategies to support the children who require additional help with their work or behaviour. For example, each teacher takes responsibility for supporting the children in class, and often there is effective guidance for the support assistants. Useful

individual education plans have been drawn up by the teachers and are reviewed regularly. Some of the children are withdrawn for short sessions of literacy support; the teacher provides a supportive environment for learning; she works patiently and encourages their efforts. The school needs, however, to review its arrangement for SEN provision, to provide additional support and resources where and when appropriate, and to ensure a greater focus on early intervention.

2.13 The children's work is marked regularly and often there are supportive, personalised comments which are both constructive and encouraging. The best marking identifies strengths and areas for improvement in the children's work. The school, however, recognises the need to promote more fully a much stronger focus on marking for improvement.

2.14 The school is organised and managed effectively. Since taking up her position eight years ago, the Principal has worked diligently with the staff and governors and is committed to the life and work of the school, and to the well-being of the children. She brings a high level of skill and enthusiasm to her work and she is supported ably by all the staff. Under her strong leadership, the school has been moving forward on a range of suitable pastoral and curricular developments; in addition, she has a clear vision for the school. In her teaching she is an effective role-model for the staff, and she is committed to setting and achieving high standards in learning and teaching. She promotes a team approach and is developing and strengthening the role of the subject co-ordinators, for example, in monitoring and evaluating provision in their areas of responsibility. All of the work is guided by a well-conceived and regularly reviewed SDP in which the Principal and staff have identified key areas for further improvement which this inspection endorses.

2.15 The quality of the accommodation is excellent; the school is presented and maintained attractively, and cleaned to a very high standard.

3. **CONCLUSION**

3.1 The strengths of the school include:

- the very positive, caring and inclusive ethos;
- the very good working relationships at all levels;
- the exemplary behaviour of most of the children and their positive attitude to learning;
- the good standard of most of the teaching;
- the leadership, dedication and commitment of the Principal;
- the good progress made in the use of ICT in supporting learning and teaching in English;
- the wide range of extra-curricular activities which enriches the children's experiences; and

- the strong support of the parents and the governors and the school's popularity and high standing in the local community.

3.2 The areas for improvement include the need for:

- the teachers to review their teaching approaches and to ensure that the work is matched to the wide range of abilities of individuals and groups of children within their classes; and
- the school to provide a sharper focus on monitoring the performance and standards achieved by the children from year to year; there is a need to make more effective use of the statistical information available, in order to set realistic targets for the children, and to influence and modify classroom practice. It will be important for the staff to develop, over time, an increased self-evaluative culture.

3.3 In the areas inspected, the school has important strengths in most of its educational and pastoral provision. The inspection has identified minor areas for improvement which the school has the capacity to address.

The school's progress on the areas for improvement will be followed-up by the District Inspector.

APPENDIX

HEALTH AND SAFETY

- The arrival, collection and dropping off of children at the school should be reviewed to ensure that these operations do not present a risk to the children, their parents and others. The narrowness of the main road adjacent to the school, the increasing enrolment and additional traffic is resulting in this situation becoming more hazardous.

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