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*The Education and Training Inspectorate -
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INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

Education and Training Inspectorate

Report of a Focused Inspection

Dungannon Primary School

Inspected: November 2008

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 SCHOOL CONTEXT

Dungannon Primary School is located in the centre of Dungannon. The children come mainly from the town and the surrounding area. The school has an inclusive school environment which consists of both mainstream and Learning Support Classes (LSCs). There has been some fluctuation in enrolment in recent years, the figure now stands at 197 children in the mainstream classes and 22 children in the LSCs. Approximately one-third of the children have English as a second language. At the time of the inspection, approximately 19% of the children were entitled to free school meals and approximately 31% of the children were on the Special Educational Needs (SEN) register.

1.2 FOCUS

The inspection focused on the quality of the children's experiences in literacy and numeracy and the use of information and communication technology (ICT) in promoting and supporting learning and teaching. The school's arrangements for pastoral care, including child protection, were also evaluated.

1.3 THE VIEWS OF THE PARENTS, TEACHERS, GOVERNORS AND CHILDREN

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 for the Board of Governors (governors) and a group of children from year 6.

One hundred and six questionnaires were issued to parents in the primary school and 22 to parents in the LSCs; approximately 38% of these were returned to the Department of Education (DE). Twenty returns contained additional written comments. Nearly all of the responses indicated a very high level of satisfaction with the provision in both the school and the LSCs. In particular, the parents highlighted the happy, friendly learning environment, the opportunities afforded to the children to fulfil their full potential, and the hardworking and caring teaching and non-teaching staff. All of the teachers completed the staff questionnaire; while the responses were highly affirmative of many aspects of the work of the school, concerns were raised about the quality of communication between the Principal and the teachers. An analysis of the questionnaires and the written comments made by the parents and the staff were shared with the Principal and the governors.

The governors spoke very positively about the welcoming atmosphere within the school, the commitment of the recently appointed Principal and the staff's hard work and dedication in the interests of the children and the wider community.

The children in year 6 reported that they feel happy and safe in the school and that they know who to speak to if they have any concerns.

1.4 PASTORAL CARE

The quality of provision for pastoral care is very good. The children are well-mannered, friendly and courteous; their behaviour is exemplary. An inclusive, caring and supportive ethos is evident in classes and the teachers make good use of praise and encouragement to motivate the children. The school regularly awards achievement incentives to encourage the children's sense of self-esteem and self-confidence. The classroom assistants, office staff, cleaning staff and other ancillary personnel contribute significantly to promoting and maintaining a pleasant working environment for the children. In addition, their learning and social development are enhanced through regular visits to places of educational interest and visitors to the school. The system of class councils ensures the children make a valuable input to the life and work of the school; their views and opinions on a range of issues are sought and valued. Links have been established with other local schools, and also further away in County Donegal, through the Dissolving Boundaries Programme. The school contributes to selected charities and an appropriate emphasis is placed on the importance of caring for others in the wider community. The children's learning experiences are further enriched through their participation in a wide range of sporting and non-sporting extra-curricular activities.

1.5 CHILD PROTECTION

The school has satisfactory arrangements in place for safeguarding children. These arrangements broadly reflect the guidance issued by DE but the following minor area needs to be addressed: to update training in child protection procedures for a designated member of the governors.

1.6 HEALTHY EATING AND PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

The school gives very good attention to promoting healthy eating and physical activity, for example healthy breaks and school dinners, which encourage the children to adopt healthy lifestyles.

2. ACHIEVEMENTS AND STANDARDS

2.1 LEARNING

In all year groups, the children are motivated and engaged in the learning process; they have enjoyable opportunities to interact with each other in group and paired work, there is appropriate emphasis on the promotion of independent thinking and learning skills and at times they take responsibility for aspects of their own learning. In class discussions, the children are responsive and articulate. The staff have identified the children in foundation stage (FS), Key Stage (KS)1 and KS2 whose attainment is low; they use appropriate and effective strategies to support their learning needs, including differentiated work, resources appropriate to their ability and specific special needs support, when appropriate.

2.2 ENGLISH AND LITERACY

The quality of provision for English and literacy is outstanding. The literacy co-ordinator provides highly effective strategic leadership and has a clear vision for the development of this area of the school's work. Regular meetings, school-based staff training sessions, collaborative planning and consistent and thorough monitoring and evaluation of the children's learning, including running records, contribute to the high standards achieved in English within the classes. By year 7 almost all the children are attaining standards in English that are in line with their age and ability levels.

In all key stages, the children are motivated and keen to talk about their work. The majority of the children express their thoughts and ideas confidently and articulately. The effective use of Reading Recovery strategies, integrated into classroom teaching, and the emphasis on well-planned opportunities for the children to interact with teachers and with peers encourage the development of very good talking and listening skills across the school.

In the FS and KS1 the children are provided with a stimulating and language rich environment and are exposed to a range of different genre; this promotes their interest in books and the written word. The effective use of practical equipment, for example, individual whiteboards and magnetic letter shapes supports the development of word recognition, while shared and guided reading encourages the acquisition of basic reading skills. The staff have recently embarked on the introduction of a structured Phono-Graphix programme across key stages to assist in raising standards further.

In KS2 the children experience a variety of approaches, including shared, guided and independent reading. By the end of KS2, the majority of the children are reading with fluency, understanding and pleasure in line with their ability. In the best practice, guided reading takes place in small groups where the children have the opportunity to discuss texts and work collaboratively on challenging and interesting tasks.

The standard of written work achieved by the children is very good and is celebrated in attractive displays throughout the school. Information and community technology is effectively integrated into the classroom activities and the children use it competently as a tool to improve the quality of their written work. The children are provided with opportunities to write for a variety of purposes and audiences and the use of real-life contexts makes this work more meaningful to the pupils. The staff have identified guided writing as an area for development. The current focus on implementing key aspects of assessment for learning such as the use of learning intentions, success criteria, self and peer assessment is having a positive impact on the quality of the written work achieved by the children throughout the school.

2.3 MATHEMATICS AND NUMERACY

There are many strengths within the school's numeracy provision. The school's programme for mathematics is suitably broad and provides the children with a wide range of experiences. The children engage in a range of problem-solving and investigative mathematics and are given significant opportunities to work collaboratively with their peers in pairs and small

groups. Many of the learning opportunities make use of a broad range of practical equipment. Information and community technology is used very effectively, with teachers making good use of interactive whiteboards, computer programmes and websites to support learning and teaching in mathematics.

The co-ordinator has a clear vision for the development of mathematics and provides effective leadership. She supports her colleagues in implementing the programme and monitors and evaluates the children's mathematical learning through, for example, regular sampling of their books. Whole school action planning has appropriately identified the need to support those children who experience difficulty with mathematics. One teacher has been trained in numeracy recovery strategies and provides regular support to some of the children during afternoon withdrawal sessions. Additional members of staff have been identified for training in order to further enhance this important aspect of the school's work.

Evidence from the school's own data together with inspection findings indicate considerable variation in standards in mathematics throughout the school. Where the standards attained are good or very good the children are confident in their understanding of place value, can work flexibly with numbers, are competent in estimating and measuring and can apply their understanding and skills to solving problems and carrying out investigations. The staff now need to evaluate all available data to enable them to identify whole school trends and to ensure appropriate challenge for all the children, particularly in number.

3. THE QUALITY OF PROVISION FOR LEARNERS

3.1 PLANNING

There is very effective and consistent planning, with teachers working collaboratively in year groups. The planning is used well to guide the teachers in their day-to-day work with the children. There are clear links between the long and medium-term planning and the School Development Plan (SDP). The teachers evaluate well in order to inform future planning and to meet the needs of all the children. The staff plan to review their half-termly Literacy Planners to reflect recent training and changes in the Northern Ireland Curriculum (NIC).

3.2 TEACHING

During the inspection, the majority of the teaching was very good or better; a significant minority of the lessons observed were judged to be outstanding. This effective practice included the well paced and structured lessons, the promotion of independent learning among the children and the effective integration of ICT to support learning in both literacy and numeracy. The school has made very good progress in embracing the underlying principles of the NIC and teachers employ a wide range of teaching strategies to develop active learning. The teachers are ably supported in their work by the skill and commitment of the classroom assistants.

3.3 ASSESSMENT

The teachers mark the children's written work regularly. In the majority of cases the marking is of a supportive nature with extended and evaluative feedback provided. There is also regular monitoring of the children's work by the co-ordinators. Good use is made of the available data at class level to inform the planning and to meet individual needs, however,

there is a need to develop further the monitoring of the internal and external performance data of the children's attainment to take more account of the year on year trends that are emerging. The parents are kept well informed regarding their children's progress through regular parent teacher meetings and annual reports.

3.4 SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS

There are 57 children on the Special Educational Needs register in the school. A further 30 children have been assessed by the school as requiring additional help with their learning. The special educational needs co-ordinator co-ordinates and monitors effectively the additional learning needs of the children, ensuring that their progress is regularly reviewed with additional help planned and undertaken when needed.

The provision for the children with identified needs in literacy and spoken English is outstanding and includes specialized support by the teacher for intensive support through withdrawal groups and skilled, differentiated classroom teaching. The school makes good use of a range of standardized tests to identify the children's difficulties in literacy at an appropriately early stage. The children's progress is monitored carefully through Running Records and the resultant information is used well to inform future education plans (EPs). The children achieve well as evidenced by improved talking and listening, and reading and writing skills. A classroom assistant provides effective additional help for those children who arrive at the school with little or no English.

3.5 LEARNING SUPPORT CLASSES

There are 19 children in three LSCs and three KS1 children in a class for children who have an autistic spectrum disorder (ASD). The classes are located in the various appropriate KS areas within the school. Each child has a statement of special educational need and has been placed in the LSCs or the ASD class by the Southern Education and Library Board. The teachers and classroom assistants demonstrate a commitment to the children and their needs and the classroom assistants support effectively the work of the teachers. Relationships in the classes are very good.

There is a very caring atmosphere throughout the classes. The learning environment is supportive and stimulating, with a clear focus on praising and rewarding positive behaviour. The children are enthusiastic about their work and are motivated by the practical work and by the good use of interactive whiteboards. Generally, there are good quality EPs and specific targets for the children which are met within overall, detailed written planning. The teachers work hard to involve parents and there are formal and informal opportunities to share information about the children's progress. In a majority of the lessons observed, the teaching is of a good standard. In almost a quarter of the lessons, the quality of the teaching is outstanding. In this best practice, the teacher has high expectations for the children. The quality of the teacher's assessment, recording and planning is thorough, informs teaching and records the progress made by the children. The targets set for the children are realistic and achievable, and they engage well in a range of practical activities. It is appropriate that this very good practice is disseminated further.

The teachers in the unit classes plan with the other teachers to ensure that the children have effective and appropriate integration opportunities to learn alongside their peers in the mainstream primary school classes. This practice is very effective and the school should continue to develop this aspect of its work.

It is timely that the Principal and the management team review the roles and responsibilities to ensure that the provision within the special units is co-ordinated effectively.

4. LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

4.1 LEADERSHIP

The Principal has been in post for less than one year. During this time he has focused his attention on dealing with largely administrative duties, including a projected deficit in the school budget, a staff audit and a review of the Pastoral Care and Child Protection policy and procedures. While he demonstrates good administrative skills there is now a need for him to develop strong and effective leadership that will guide the staff in all future development work. It remains for the Principal, together with the governors, to refocus on developing effective communications throughout the school and to review the roles and responsibilities of all staff and co-ordinators.

The hard-working Vice-principal (VP) is dedicated and well-informed in her work. Both the VP and the Senior Management Team (SMT) contribute significantly to the overall effectiveness of the teaching and learning within the school and provide good pastoral support for colleagues. The SDP meets fully the requirements of the DE School Development Planning Regulations/Schedule 2005/19. It is appropriate for the Principal together with staff to review the current SDP in the light of the findings of this report.

5. CONCLUSION

5.1 The strengths of the school include:

- the friendly and totally inclusive ethos that permeates the life and work of the school;
- the quality of the teaching which was very good or outstanding in a majority of the lessons observed;
- the good standards in English achieved by the children;
- the high quality and very effective provision for intensive learning support provided for the children identified as requiring additional help with aspects of their learning;
- the effectiveness of the SMT and co-ordinators in guiding the staff in their work; and
- the very good use of ICT to support the children's learning.

The areas for improvement include the need:

- to develop effective channels of communication at all levels; and
- to review the roles and responsibilities of all the staff and co-ordinators.

In most of the areas inspected the quality of education provided in this organisation is satisfactory; the strengths outweigh areas for improvement in the provision. The inspection has identified areas for improvement in leadership and management which need to be addressed if the needs of all the learners are to be met more effectively. The Education and Training Inspectorate will monitor and report on the organisation's progress in addressing the areas for improvement.

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