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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**

**Gilnahirk Primary School**  
**Belfast**

**Inspected: May 2007**

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## BASIC INFORMATION SHEET (BIS) - PRIMARY SCHOOLS

- A. i. **School: Gilnahirk Primary** iii. **Date of Inspection: W/B 14.05.07**  
 ii. **School Reference Number: 401-1606** iv. **Nature of Inspection: FI/En/ICT/SEN**

B.

School Year	2002/03	2003/04	2004/05	2005/06	2006/07
Year 1 Intake	56	60	53	59	48
<b>Enrolments</b>					
Primary	418	422	419	406	393
Reception	0	0	0	0	0
Nursery Class/Classes	0	0	0	0	0
Special Unit	1	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):

95.7%

Primary & Reception	Nursery Unit	Special Unit
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- D. i. Number of Teachers  
 (including the principal and part-time teachers): 15.96 - -  
 (Full-time equivalent = 25 teaching hours)
- ii. PTR (Pupil/Teacher Ratio): 24.6 NI PTR: 20.5
- iii. Average Class Size: 28
- iv. Class Size (Range): 24 to 30
- v. Ancillary Support:  
 Number of Hours **Per Week**:
- |   |     |
|---|-----|
| i. Clerical support:  | 36  |
| ii. Official Making A Good Start Support:                   | 40  |
| iii. Additional hours of other classroom assistant support: | 115 |
- vi. Number of children with statements of special educational needs: 9
- vii. Number of children who are not of statutory school age: 0
- viii. Percentage of children entitled to free school meals: 6.87%

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

1.1 Gilnahirk Primary School is situated in East Belfast, off the Knock Dual Carriageway. The enrolment of the school has remained steady over the past five years and currently stands at 393. Approximately 7% 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 years 6 and 7. One hundred and thirty-one questionnaires were issued to parents; approximately 56% were returned to the Department of Education (DE) of which 41 contained additional written comments. The responses from the parental questionnaires were generous in their support of the school and, in particular, of the commitment of the Principal and the staff to the well-being and education of the children. The governors, expressed their confidence in the school, and they referred particularly to the dedication and hard work of all the staff, and the links with parents and the surrounding community. The inspection findings endorse all of these views. The few concerns raised by the parents have been discussed with the Principal and the governors. The children indicated that they felt happy and safe in the school.

1.3 The inspection focused on the work in English and the effectiveness of the school's special educational needs (SEN) provision. In addition, the inspection evaluated the work in information and communication technology (ICT) in promoting and supporting learning and teaching in English. The inspection also evaluated the school's procedures for pastoral care, including child protection and the school's programme for the promotion of health and well-being.

## **2. THE QUALITY OF THE CHILDREN'S WORK**

2.1 The school provides a bright, friendly and caring learning environment for the children, and relationships at all levels are excellent. The behaviour of the children is exemplary; they are respectful to their teachers and to one another and courteous to visitors. The teaching and support staff work closely as a team, and the non-teaching staff make a valuable contribution to the life and work of the school. The learning environment is attractively presented, and colourful displays throughout the school celebrate the children's work and record their activities and achievements. The school encourages positive behaviour through a clearly understood system of rewards. The year 6 and 7 children take part in a prefect scheme to ensure that younger children are involved in the play activities.

2.2 The children's personal and social development is enhanced through their participation in a variety of extra-curricular activities including netball, football, rugby, tennis and dance. There is a strong emphasis on creativity within the school, with both children and staff actively involved in music-making. The school has a progressive programme of educational day and residential trips, including opportunities for outdoor pursuits in year 6. The children benefit through their links with the local primary and post-primary schools both in community relations and ICT projects. A range of visitors support and enhance the experiences of the children.

2.3 The school's programme for the promotion of health and well-being has many sound features including healthy breaks, and access to drinking water and milk. Appropriate attention is given to the development and implementation of programmes that encourage the children to adopt healthy lifestyles through the establishment of external links with relevant organisations. Opportunities are provided for children to participate in a range of physical activities both throughout and after the school day. An assessment of the nature and quality of arrangements for health and well-being practices within the school should be included in the School Development Plan (SDP) to comply with statutory regulations.

2.4 There are strengths in many aspects of the arrangements for pastoral care and child protection. The school has procedures in place which implement the guidance outlined in the relevant Department of Education (DE) Circulars and has identified appropriately a few areas for improvement which it is currently addressing. Among the strengths are the development of positive working relationships throughout the school, and the focus given to the personal and social development of the children in all aspects of school life. The appropriate areas for improvement identified include the need for consultation with parents, governors and children regarding the recently revised policies, and updated training for the governors.

2.5 The school has shown a strong commitment to communicating with parents on curriculum and pastoral matters. There are regular opportunities for the parents to consult with the teachers both formally and informally. The Parent Teacher Association has raised significant funds on behalf of the school to obtain, for example, outdoor and indoor play equipment, which are used to further enhance the experiences offered to the children.

2.6 The staff in each year group meet regularly to prepare their work; they are well-organised and prepared for lessons. The teachers have adopted a common format for planning work across the curriculum and there is a good match between this planning and classroom practice. In addition, the documentation reveals a good emphasis on the intended learning outcomes for the children, on progression, and on assimilating and consolidating their learning. The inspection endorses the school's intention to review the planning format to promote self-reflection and evaluation.

2.7 During the inspection, the quality of the teaching was always satisfactory; a majority of the lessons were good or very good, and a few were excellent. In the best practice, the teachers used a variety of approaches and provided a good balance of direct teaching and opportunities for the children to work independently, in pairs or in groups. The lessons were often interesting, imaginatively resourced, and differentiated to match the range of abilities of the children. The children co-operated readily with their teachers and with one another and were enthusiastic, engaged and suitably challenged. In a minority of lessons, the learning intentions were shared before, during and at the end of the lessons, and this good practice should be disseminated more widely.

2.8 The teachers show a strong commitment to promoting all aspects of literacy and, during the inspection, there were many examples of effective blending of the three modes of language in lessons: for example, class discussion of jumbled newspaper captions developed into a sequencing activity and the writing of a basic text. The staff have worked closely together to agree approaches to literacy and it would be timely to review and update the current literacy schemes. In almost all of the lessons visited across key stage (KS) 1 and KS2, the teachers sought to provide good opportunities from across the curriculum to encourage the children to listen and to respond orally. In general, the teachers use these

opportunities effectively; the contexts are varied and the teachers' prompts and questions are often open-ended. In the best practice, sufficient time is given to allow considered responses and the children's responses often provide further stimulus that the teachers use to engage others. Paired and group work activities provide children with the opportunity to co-operate well and be supportive of one another. The children's oral contributions in formal lessons and in Circle Time are valued; their oral confidence is increasing. In KS2, the children have begun to make presentations with the aid of software packages, often using images captured on digital camera.

2.9 The teachers plan systematically for the teaching of reading. In KS1, good use is made of Big Books and core reading schemes to promote engagement with text, and the enjoyment of reading has a high priority in the school. Each of the classrooms contains a well-stocked class library and the children have good access to the recently refurbished central library in the school. The children are presented with a wide range of texts including fiction, non-fiction and poetry; these link effectively with curricular themes and topics such as healthy living. As they progress through school, the children become increasingly aware of the important features of books such as the author, illustrator, title, cover, contents and summaries of the plot. Often texts are displayed on the interactive white boards to further facilitate shared and guided reading. Dictionaries and reference books are used spontaneously by children sometimes without the need of prompting from teachers. Overall, there are very good standards of reading throughout the school.

2.10 The development of the children's writing is well integrated with the other aspects of the English and wider curriculum. In line with the children's ability, the rapid development from emergent to extended and independent writing is developed effectively throughout the school. Some of this work reaches a very high standard with children writing in a wide variety of forms across the curriculum.

2.11 There is a developing culture of self-evaluation within the school, including the use of quantitative data to support the whole-school evaluation of the standards the children reach. For example, with the good quality support of a South-Eastern Education and Library Board Curriculum Advisory and Support Service officer, the school has recently analysed benchmarked data available on the children's performance in English and mathematics, and has used this to set some appropriate targets for further improvement in mathematics. To develop the culture of self-evaluation further there is an important need to make more extensive use and analysis of performance data, including standardised tests and DE benchmarking information, to review and inform further improvements in learning and teaching. This has been identified already by the school. The school should consider adjusting its SDP to take into account the detail of the inspection findings.

2.12 The children's work is marked and corrected in a regular and systematic manner. The best practice contains clear evidence of supportive, personalised comments which are both constructive and encouraging, focused on raising standards in the children's work and dealing effectively with unacceptable work. In building on this good practice, the school should review its marking procedures, to ensure that the best practice is disseminated more widely, and that there is an increased focus on marking for improvement.

2.13 It is appropriate that the school is presently reviewing its provision for play to take account of current curricular developments. At present, there are regular sessions of play in KS1 and a good range of activities and resources is provided. In all of the activities observed, the children are developing and using a range of skills, and are benefiting socially and creatively from working collaboratively with others; in addition, there are effective guidance and engagement with the adults present. The children make choices, co-operate well with one another, share ideas, role-play, and engage in extended spells of play. In developing further the provision for learning through play, it will be necessary to devise a detailed scheme of work to help ensure progression in the children's learning throughout all of KS1.

2.14 The school has identified 56 of the children as requiring additional help with their learning. There are effective procedures in place to identify those children requiring additional help at an early stage and this is a particular strength of the arrangements for SEN. The children's learning needs are identified at an early stage through a combination of observations, and the use of standardised and diagnostic tests. Individual education plans (EPs) have been devised for each child; the targets set include appropriate learning goals for the children, and there is evidence of good liaison between the Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator (SENCO) and the class teachers. The reviews of progress made, as set out in the EPs, need to be more detailed and evaluative. The school has gathered extensive data through standardised tests of the standards the children reach; however, this data needs to be analysed much more systematically, and, in particular used to measure and evaluate the progress and achievements of their children who have special educational needs. Additionally, an analysis of this data should be used to evaluate the effectiveness of the provision for those children who receive additional help for their learning through the SEN programme as they progress through the school.

2.15 The Principal has been in post for five years and is hard-working and committed, with a strong vision for the all-round development of the school into a learning community; an example being the provision of ICT courses for adults within the local community. Under his leadership, the school has made good progress in key areas; such as, in ICT, with the installation of interactive whiteboards in each classroom and accompanying well-planned staff development, and the creation of a new central library facility. He is supportive of the staff and leads by example. He is ably supported by his acting vice-principal and Senior Management Team.

2.16 The staff display high levels of professionalism and are encouraged to take on additional responsibilities and to pursue opportunities for further professional development. It is timely that the school is to review the roles and responsibilities of the present post holders and co-ordinators, develop more fully the curriculum and key stage teams, and promote a more self-evaluative culture.

2.17 The internal and external environments of the school are pleasant and well maintained and there is a rolling programme of school improvement and maintenance; further, the standard of caretaking is excellent.

### 3. CONCLUSION

#### 3.1 The strengths of the school include:

- the excellent behaviour of the children;
- the strong sense of community which includes the excellent working relationships at all levels;
- the quality of the teaching seen which was always satisfactory with a majority of the lessons good or very good and a few excellent;
- the hard work and commitment of the teaching and non-teaching staff;
- the hard work and dedication of the Principal who has an appropriate vision for the future development of the school;
- the excellent provision for ICT and the good standards achieved;
- the very good standards attained in English by nearly all the children in line with their ability;
- the strong commitment to developing curriculum and pastoral links with parents;
- the school's high standing in the local community; and
- the wide range of enrichment activities provided which enhance well the personal and social development of the children.

#### 3.2 The areas for improvement include:

- the need to ensure that the school complies fully with DE Circulars on SDPs (Circular 2005/19 School Development Regulations and Guidance) and child protection (Circular 2003/13; Circular 2006/08 'Child Protection: Training Requirements for School Governors on Staff Recruitment and Selection Panels'); and
- the need to review the roles and responsibilities of the various post holders to include a more extensive use of available quantitative data to set targets for further improvement.

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 monitored by the District Inspector.



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