



*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

Gracehill Primary School and Nursery Unit Ballymena

Inspected: May 2009

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BASIC INFORMATION SHEET (BIS) - PRIMARY SCHOOLS

- A. i. **School: Gracehill Primary Ballymena** iii. **Date of Inspection: W/B 18.05.09**
 ii. **School Reference Number: 301-0794** iv. **Nature of Inspection: FI/En/Ma/ICT**

B.

School Year	2004/05	2005/06	2006/07	2007/08	2008/09
Year 1 Intake	60	57	59	58	58
Enrolments					
Primary	408	406	409	413	407
Reception	0	0	0	0	0
Nursery Class/Classes	26	26	26	26	26
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):

96%

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

17	1	0
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- ii. PTR (Pupil/Teacher Ratio): 23.9 NI PTR: 20.8%

- iii. Average Class Size: 29.14

- iv. Class Size (Range): 27 to 31

- v. Ancillary Support:

Number of Hours **Per Week**:

- | | |
|-------------------------------------------------------------|------|
| i. Clerical support: | 42 |
| ii. Official Making A Good Start Support: | 37 |
| iii. Additional hours of other classroom assistant support: | 80.5 |

- vi. Percentage of children with statements of special educational needs: 1.2%

- vii. Total percentage of children on the Special Needs Register: 11.8%

- viii. Number of children who are **not** of statutory school age: 0

- ix. Percentage of children entitled to free school meals: 2.7%

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 SCHOOL CONTEXT

Gracehill Primary School is a controlled primary school located in the village of Gracehill on the outskirts of Ballymena. The school has a single class nursery unit attached to it. Nearly all of the children who attend the school and nursery come from within a three mile radius of the village. The enrolment has remained steady over the past five years and currently stands at 407; in addition, 26 children attend the nursery. Under 3% of the children are entitled to free school meals. The school has identified approximately 12% of the children as needing additional support with their learning. A report on the provision in the nursery is also included.

1.2 FOCUS

The focus of the inspection was 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 as well as the school's approach towards promoting healthy eating and physical activity.

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 confidential questionnaires prior to the inspection, as well as meetings with representatives from the Board of Governors (governors) and groups of children from years 6 and 7.

One hundred and four questionnaires were issued to parents; approximately 53% were returned to the Department of Education and 24 contained additional written comments. The responses from the questionnaires were mostly positive, indicating strong support for the work and life of the school. The parents commented on the friendly, approachable and supportive staff, the good range of after-school clubs provided, and the effective management of the school.

Sixteen of the teachers completed a confidential questionnaire, with seven teachers providing additional written comments. Almost all of these responses were wholly positive commenting on the caring learning environment and the collegial working relationships between the staff.

The children in year 6 spoke enthusiastically and warmly about their school. In particular, they valued the care and encouragement provided by the teachers and support staff. They reported that they feel safe at school and were very clear about whom to turn to in the event of a concern.

The governors expressed their support for the work of the school and the leadership of the Principal. They commented favourably on the positive ethos within the school, the good working relationships at all levels, and the effective links between the school and the local community.

In the nursery, 46% of the parents responded to the questionnaires and five made additional written comments. The responses indicate that the parents regard the nursery highly and appreciate the excellent purpose-built facilities, and the hard-working and encouraging staff.

The Education and Training Inspectorate (Inspectorate) has reported to the Principal and representatives of the governors the few other concerns emerging from the parents' and teachers' questionnaires.

1.4 PASTORAL CARE

The quality of the arrangements for pastoral care in the school and nursery is very good. Among the strengths are the supportive and caring ethos within the school and the very good working relationships between the children, their teachers and the support staff. The children respond positively to the teachers' expectations and their behaviour is always very good and at times exemplary. They are courteous, welcoming and display very good personal and social skills. There is an extensive range of after-school activities, which are well attended and valued by the children and parents. The school makes regular and effective contributions to good causes and an appropriate emphasis is placed upon developing a strong sense of individual and social responsibility. In the nursery, the staff demonstrate a strong commitment to the welfare of the children. There are appropriate policies and procedures in place to ensure that the children are settled, happy and confident.

1.5 CHILD PROTECTION

The school has satisfactory arrangements in place for safeguarding the children. These arrangements broadly reflect the guidance issued by the relevant Department, but the following areas need to be addressed: the school needs to ensure that all of the remaining non-teaching staff who have not yet received child protection training complete a relevant course as soon as possible; and the school needs to ensure that the nominated representatives from the governors have their child protection training updated.

The nursery has very good arrangements in place for safeguarding children. These arrangements reflect the guidance issued by the relevant Department.

1.6 HEALTHY EATING AND PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

The school gives very good attention to promoting healthy eating and physical activity through, for example, the success in national cookery competitions and productive links made with food and business agencies, which encourage the children to adopt healthy lifestyles.

The nursery gives good attention to promoting healthy eating and physical activity through, for example, the daily opportunities for the children to enjoy outdoor play experiences. The areas for improvement identified include the need to provide more opportunities for the children to develop independence and a sense of responsibility at snack time.

1.7 LINKS WITH PARENTS

The school has developed effective links with parents to ensure they work together for the benefit of the children, including those with additional learning needs. Communication with parents is maintained through a regular newsletter, the school website, and information evenings. In addition, there is a well established and active Parent Association.

1.8 LINKS WITH OTHERS

The school has established very good links with the local community, businesses, and schools in other European countries all of which enhance the children's learning experiences.

2. ACHIEVEMENTS AND STANDARDS

2.1 LEARNING

Overall, the standards of learning are good. Most of the children are highly motivated, engage well and show an interest in their learning, often demonstrating resilience and independence. The children also work co-operatively and collaboratively in pairs and groups. They are developing good thinking skills and their social skills are excellent. Levels of attainment in end of key stage assessments in English and mathematics have risen steadily over the past three years; however, in both key stages, a minority of the more able children is not achieving a standard consistent with that of children of a similar age in similar schools.

2.2 ENGLISH AND LITERACY

The quality of provision for language and literacy is good. The school's literacy action plan prioritises appropriately the need to raise the overall levels of attainment in line with the Northern Ireland average. The steps taken to train staff in, and consistently implement, a phonics programme is a significant step towards improving the standards.

The school has identified appropriately the need to update the literacy policy. Those with responsibility for literacy also need to update both the long-term and medium-term planning in order to focus clearly on the intended learning and to reflect the requirements of the curriculum. The co-ordinator has adopted an appropriately collegial approach, involving staff in consultation and evaluation at different stages of the review process.

In the foundation stage (FS) and key stage (KS) 1, play-based learning promotes appropriately the development of the children's oral skills and helps develop their confidence. As they progress through KS2 the children's talking and listening continues to be supported through extensive group and paired work, in which thinking skills and personal capabilities, such as working with others, are being developed. The teachers have developed effective questioning styles, creating opportunities for the children to provide extended responses.

In the FS and KS1, the children are acquiring basic reading skills through the development of phonological awareness and experience of modelled, shared and guided reading. The children observed reading aloud in KS1 displayed confident word recognition skills and increasing fluency. In KS2, reading is promoted further by an emphasis on sustained silent reading timetabled during the school day. By the end of KS2, the children are able to engage with an increasingly sophisticated range of texts, matched to their needs.

In the FS, the children become familiar with different forms of print and experiment with writing in a range of informal contexts. In KS1, basic conventions such as simple sentence structure and letter-writing are developed appropriately through shared writing activities and writing frames. In KS2, there are opportunities for the children to draft, write for a variety of purposes, and develop extended writing across the curriculum.

The literacy co-ordinator has begun appropriately to review the school's marking policy in order to establish consistent procedures for correcting errors in spelling, punctuation and grammar.

2.3 MATHEMATICS AND NUMERACY

The overall quality of the provision for mathematics in the school is good and the standards are improving, particularly at KS1. At KS2 there is a need to improve the levels of attainment in end of key stage assessments.

The long-term planning outlines appropriately the progression in the children's mathematical understanding and is suitably broad and balanced.

In the FS, the children experience a range of well-planned, play-based activities through which they are developing early mathematical language, concepts and understanding appropriate to their age and ability. They are beginning to develop their skills in mental mathematics and have opportunities during guided mathematical activities to sort, match, count, compare and make patterns and sequences in a variety of contexts.

At KS1, the children engage in a range of practical activities which help develop their understanding of number, measures, shape, and handling data. In the best practice observed, the children had appropriate opportunities to extend their mathematical thinking and develop mental strategies which were linked effectively to the main focus of the mathematics lesson. In year 4, the most able children spoke positively about their mathematics and demonstrated a sound understanding of place value and a good recall of number bonds.

At KS2, the children enjoy their mathematics and are encouraged to apply their mathematical skills across the learning areas. In the best practice evaluated, the children were given appropriate time and encouragement to communicate and explain their mathematical thinking. In discussions with the year 7 children, the most able demonstrated a good understanding of number, mental mathematics strategies, estimation, measures, shape and space and processes. In order to raise further the standards, there is a need to ensure that the learning activities are appropriately differentiated to meet the needs of all the children, and to provide greater challenge and extension to the mathematical experiences of the more able children.

Information and communication technology is used effectively throughout the school to reinforce the children's mathematical understanding; for example, interactive whiteboards are used well to support learning and the children have access to an appropriate range of computer software packages.

The numeracy co-ordinator provides effective leadership in numeracy. She supports her colleagues in reviewing, developing and implementing the planned programme and has begun to use performance data to identify those children who would benefit from additional numeracy support. She has identified appropriately the need to establish a more structured approach to monitoring and evaluating the quality of the provision for numeracy across the school and to raise the standards achieved by the more able children.

3. THE QUALITY OF PROVISION FOR LEARNING

3.1 PLANNING

The teachers are hard-working and prepare well for lessons. In general, there is a need to develop further the medium-term planning by focusing on the intended learning and ensuring appropriate differentiation in order to meet effectively the needs of all of the children. In the best practice, the teachers evaluate the quality of the children's learning experiences, and use the evaluations to inform future planning. This good practice needs to be extended throughout the school.

3.2 TEACHING

The quality of the teaching observed ranged from very good to unsatisfactory in the case of one teacher; most of the lessons seen were good or very good. In the best practice observed, the learning intentions were made clear to the children, a good range of teaching and learning strategies were used, and appropriate cognisance was taken of the children's preferred learning styles. During these lessons the pace was appropriate, the children engaged actively in their learning and developed their thinking skills by responding to the teacher's effective questioning. In the less effective practice, there was insufficient challenge, the teaching was over-directed, and the work was not sufficiently differentiated to meet the learning needs of all of the children.

3.3 ASSESSMENT

The teachers use a suitable range of classroom observations and standardised tests to gain an overview of the children's performance. The parents are kept well informed of their children's progress through parental interviews and written reports. The teachers are beginning to implement some assessment strategies such as the sharing of learning intentions with the children. There is now a need to develop further the use of success criteria to encourage the children to evaluate their own learning and set meaningful targets for self-improvement. The children's work is marked regularly and, in the best practice, the teachers annotate the work, often indicating how, if necessary, it could be improved.

3.4 SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS

The provision for children with special educational needs is very good. The special educational needs co-ordinator, the special educational needs teacher and the two classroom assistants provide high quality support for children who have additional learning needs in literacy. These children are identified at an early stage, through the use of teacher observation and the analysis of diagnostic assessments. The current provision for the children is through withdrawal sessions and specific peripatetic support. The children respond well to this support, are gaining in confidence, self-esteem and are making steady progress.

The targets in individual educational plans are specific, reviewed regularly, and provide a useful guide to inform classroom practice. There is good evidence of the children's increasing involvement in the setting of, and reflection on, their personal learning targets. The progress of the children is monitored closely and there is clear evidence that actions taken have resulted in improvements in learning.

The school accesses appropriately the support services of external agencies and good progress has been made in addressing the requirements of the Special Educational Needs Disability Order (SENDO) within the school.

4. LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

4.1 LEADERSHIP

The Principal provides good leadership and is supported ably by a highly effective senior management team (SMT) with clearly defined roles and responsibilities. There is good internal communication at all levels and a strong sense of collegiality within the school. The co-ordinators also provide good leadership within their respective curricular or pastoral areas. In order to disseminate good practice, to continue to raise standards and bring about ongoing improvement, there is a need to develop further the monitoring and evaluation at all levels within the school.

4.2 PLANNING FOR IMPROVEMENT

The school's process for improvement has many strengths; it is clearly linked to a school development plan (SDP) and associated action plans. In order to meet fully the requirements of the School Development Plans Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2005, there is a need to consult more widely with the key members of the school community including the children and the parents, and to evaluate more fully the progress towards meeting targets at all levels. To develop further self-evaluation within the school, there is a need to make more extensive use of the available performance data to inform further improvements in learning.

4.3 STAFF DEVELOPMENT

There is an effective staff development programme that is linked appropriately to the SDP priorities and meets well the needs of the school and the individual teaching and non-teaching staff.

4.4 ACCOMMODATION

The quality of the accommodation and the standard of caretaking in the school is very good.

4.5 RESOURCES, FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT AND GOVERNANCE

The governors are supportive of the Principal and staff and take an active role in the work and life of the school. The school is very well resourced.

5. CONCLUSION

5.1 The strengths of the school include:

- the highly motivated children who engage well in their learning;
- the good quality of the provision for literacy and numeracy;
- the quality and effectiveness of the provision for those children with special educational needs;
- the very good outworking of the school's vision statement, 'caring, learning and achieving together';
- the good leadership provided by the Principal supported ably by a highly effective SMT with clearly defined roles and responsibilities; and
- the very good working relationships at all levels throughout the school.

5.2 The areas for improvement include the need:

- to increase the level of challenge, particularly for the more able children, in order to raise further the standards that they attain; and
- to develop further the monitoring and evaluation at all levels in order to bring about ongoing improvement in standards.

5.3 In the areas inspected, the quality of education provided by the school is generally good. The school has important strengths in most of its educational and pastoral provision. The inspection has identified areas for improvement which the school has demonstrated the capacity to address.

The Inspectorate will monitor the school's progress on the areas for improvement.

6. THE NURSERY UNIT

6.1 The main strengths within the educational and pastoral provision of the nursery are as follows:

- There is a positive ethos throughout the playroom which promotes a settled and caring atmosphere. The staff are committed to the children's welfare; they are hard-working and demonstrate an enthusiastic approach to their work with the children.
- The staff provide sensitive support as they engage with the children at their activities. They consistently implement positive behaviour management strategies and the children's behaviour is good.
- The programme offers satisfactory or good opportunities for learning in all areas of the curriculum. During the inspection there were particular strengths in the promotion of early science and the world around us and the development of a range of skills through the children's experiences outdoors.
- The staff make good efforts to identify and support those children who require additional help with their learning and to maintain effective liaison with the parents.
- The staff are developing a range of methods to keep the parents informed of the daily programme and the children's progress. Effective arrangements are in place to ensure that the children from the nursery make a smooth transition to year 1.
- The teacher-in-charge of the nursery is committed to reflect on and improve the practice, particularly in relation to developing the overall quality of the provision.

6.2 The inspection identified areas for improvement. The following are the most important areas that need attention:

- The staff need to develop further the organisation of the daily timetable to ensure that necessary routines and activities are well managed and make the most effective use of all the time available to promote learning.
- The staff need to develop a more collaborative approach to planning the programme and assessing the children's progress in order to extend more fully the learning potential within the resources to enrich further the children's play experiences.

The staff have started to implement some useful methods of self-evaluation. Although this work is at an early stage, some progress has been made in observing the practice in the playroom, developing appropriate policies and procedures to guide the practice, seeking the views of parents, and reviewing the provision made for outdoor play.

6.3 In the areas inspected, the quality of education provided by the nursery is good. The nursery has important strengths in most of its educational and pastoral provision. The inspection has identified areas for improvement which the nursery has demonstrated the capacity to address.

The Inspectorate will monitor the nursery's progress on the areas for improvement.

STATISTICAL INFORMATION ON GRACEHILL PRIMARY SCHOOL NURSERY UNIT

1. Details of Children

Number of children:	Class 1	Class 2
Attending full-time	0	0
Attending part-time	26	0
Under 3 years of age*	0	0
With statement of SEN**	0	0
At CoP stages 3 or 4***	1	0
At CoP stages 1 or 2***	0	0
With English as an additional language	0	0

* On 1 July.

** Special Educational Needs.

*** The stages refer to those set out in the Code of Practice for the Identification and Assessment of Special Educational Needs.

Percentage qualifying under DE admission criteria 1 or 2.	0%
Average attendance for the previous year.	87%

2. Duration of Sessions

Full-time	Part-time: am	Part-time: pm
-	2 hours 30 minutes	-

3. Details of Staff

Number of:	Full-Time	Part-Time
Teachers	0	1
Nursery Assistants	0	0
Qualified Nursery Assistants	0	1

Number of: ****	
Students	0
Trainees	2

**** Total placements since September of current year

4. Parental Questionnaires

Number issued	26
Percentage returned	46%
Number of written comments	5

APPENDIX

HEALTH AND SAFETY (PRIMARY)

- The special educational needs room does not have a view panel in the door.

ACCOMMODATION (NURSERY UNIT)

- Accommodation for the storage of equipment is inadequate.

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