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INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

Education and Training Inspectorate

Report of a Focused Inspection

**Jordanstown School
Newtownabbey**

Inspected: January 2008

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Jordanstown School provides education for pupils, aged four to 19 years, who are deaf or have visual impairments. Many of the pupils have additional needs, including learning, physical, medical, or behavioural. The school also manages a Visually Impaired Advisory Service (VIAS) providing specialist advice and support to schools in the Belfast Education and Library Board (BELB) and the North-Eastern Education and Library Board (NEELB) areas. Currently, some 173 pupils have access to this service.

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 groups of pupils from across the school. Twenty-three of the 56 parental questionnaires issued were returned to the Department of Education (DE) and 13 of these included a written comment. Most of the responses were very positive about the work of the school; any concerns raised by the parents were brought to the attention of the Principal and the governors. These were in relation to a range of topics including poor accommodation, lack of adequate therapy provision and the need for further integration with other schools. At the meeting with the governors, they expressed their commitment to, and support for, the school. In discussions with the inspection team, the pupils confirmed that they felt safe in school and knew who to contact if they had difficulties.

1.3 The focus of the inspection was on the quality of provision to meet the individual needs of the pupils and the arrangements for child protection and pastoral care.

2. ACHIEVEMENTS AND STANDARDS

2.1 In this report, standards of achievement are judged in relation to the pupils' previous attainments, their individual abilities and their special educational needs. Most of the pupils achieve very good standards across the range of subjects. The high quality of the teaching provision ensures that they make very good progress towards meeting their learning goals which fit their individual needs. They make good progress from year to year and this is well illustrated by the levels of accreditation being achieved in key stage 4 and at post-16. All of the pupils progressively develop independent learning skills and gain a mature understanding of their impairments and how best to manage in the school environment and beyond.

2.2 The ethos of the school celebrates the pupils' achievements. A constant, remaining challenge for the staff is to provide further opportunities for the pupils to apply their learning and social skills across various settings, particularly in mainstream schools.

2.3 The school's programme for the promotion of health and well-being has important strengths. Attention is paid to the development and implementation of healthy eating and physical activity programmes, for example, healthy eating displays, healthy breaks and lunches and the encouragement to drink water. The areas for improvement identified include the need to incorporate food-related health initiatives taking place within the school into a healthy eating policy and to monitor and evaluate the health education programme and healthy eating provision.

2.4 The inspection findings indicate the following key achievements and standards:

- the substantial gains made by most of the pupils in their learning across the curriculum and their improved skills in communication, self-esteem and confidence;
- the increasing involvement of some of the pupils in assessing their own work and outlining their targets for learning;
- the good level of performance of the pupils in the wide range of appropriate accredited courses on offer to them; and
- the good sense of achievement and enjoyment the pupils demonstrate in most lessons; for example, in the music lessons observed, the pupils enjoyed the activities, participated fully and demonstrated good learning.

3. **QUALITY OF PROVISION FOR LEARNING**

3.1 Overall, almost 80% of the lessons observed were graded consistently very good, including some 20% which were of excellent quality. The pupils enjoy their learning and make good progress. The teachers and assistants are very skilled at motivating the pupils to learn and set appropriately different challenges for them as individual learners. A particularly strong feature of the teaching is the effective use made of a range of teaching methods and resources to promote active participation in lessons. There were some good incidences when information and communication technology was used well to support the individual needs of the pupils. Planning for the outreach support is of a good standard.

3.2 The arrangements for the pastoral care and child protection in the school have a few strengths. There are, however, important areas for improvement which require prompt action to ensure that the policies and procedures are fully in line with the guidance outlined in the relevant DE circulars. In particular, the school needs to inform all parents of its pastoral care and child protection procedures at least once every two years, consult with parents and pupils on the school bullying policy and maintain a Record of Child Abuse Complaints which the Chairperson and Vice-Chairperson review at least annually.

3.3 The main strengths of the quality of provision for learning are:

- the very good quality of most of the teaching and, in particular, the high quality of the teachers' and assistants' expertise which ensures that the pupils' understanding is secure and enables good progress to be made;
- the friendly, polite and well-mannered pupils;
- the supportive and caring ethos which permeates all lessons and promotes learning;
- the very good working relationships in the school and the staff's commitment to the well-being of the pupils;

- the learning objectives which are clearly communicated to the pupils at the start of the lessons and reinforced to ensure learning and achievement; and
- the strong sense of team-work and specialist knowledge and skills of the teachers and assistants which underpins the planning for the lessons.

4. LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

4.1 The school is well managed. The Principal and Vice-principal have established a very positive school ethos. The staff demonstrate a high level of commitment to improving provision and raising standards. This is reflected in the efforts to progress the replacement of the present school building, which has major deficiencies. More needs to be done, however, to progress the replacement of the school and, more significantly, to underline the role of the school if it is to develop as a regional service in the future.

4.2 The inspection findings indicate the need for a major review of the school development planning to sharpen its focus, and of the advisory service to clarify its remit and ensure that the new building is suitably resourced to enable this to happen. The findings indicate also that the future model of provision at Jordanstown School should have a strong regard for the high level of skill and expertise of the staff and how best this can serve the needs of pupils who require specialist educational provision, on a full-time or part-time basis. This future development should have the capacity to support mainstream schools to provide for pupils who are deaf or have visual impairments to ensure that the quality of support they receive is specific to their sensory needs.

4.3 The Principal and senior management of the school need to improve the system of monitoring and evaluation to enable the school to demonstrate a clear record of progress and achievement, both within the school and in the advisory service.

4.4 Much of the advisory service work relates to initial assessment and guidance to intervention and curricular access. This is a major strength of the service and highly needed. The support is clearly focused on the needs of the pupils, their parents and schools and is well set out in the VIAS materials and notes for teachers. Currently, the service operates only in the BELB and the NEELB and casual links are established with vision support teachers in the other Education and Library Boards. No advisory support service is provided for the deaf. It is logical that, within an impending single authority, the school and other key stakeholders should co-ordinate the development of a regional sensory advisory and support service. Jordanstown School is well positioned to inform and provide a centralised resource for such a service.

4.5 The main strengths of the leadership and management of the school are:

- the efficient administration and support materials in place to help promote teaching and learning;
- the sense of team-work throughout the school, including the active efforts of the staff to promote a high level of pupil achievement;
- the priority given to the professional development of teachers and assistants;

- the emerging self-evaluation process whereby staff share and formally discuss their work with a view to raising standards and promoting best practice; and
- the support and involvement of the members of the Board of Governors.

5. **OVERALL EFFECTIVENESS**

5.1 The inspection findings indicate that the overall effectiveness of the school presents many strengths with some important areas for improvement.

5.2 The inspection has identified the following strengths:

- the positive ethos of the school and the high level of staff commitment to the needs of the pupils;
- the school's programme for the promotion of health and well-being;
- the very good quality of the teaching throughout the school;
- the high level of expertise and skills of the staff in relation to sensory impairment; and
- the support, involvement and commitment of the members of the Board of Governors to the future development of the school.

6. **AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT**

6.1 The inspection findings indicate the following key areas for improvement.

There is a need for the staff, lead by the management team to:

- ensure that the child protection procedures meet fully the guidance and requirements outlined in the relevant DE circulars, and prioritise the development of a forum whereby the views of the pupils can be ascertained;
- develop further a systematic, formal and documented approach to the process of monitoring and evaluating the quality and consistency of learning and teaching to lead to further improvement;
- improve the opportunities the pupils have to learn alongside their peers in other mainstream settings; and
- develop a long-term, strategic view of the role of the school and the advisory and support service.

7. **CONCLUSION**

7.1 In the areas inspected, the school has strengths in many aspects of its educational provision. The inspection has identified a few areas for improvement in important areas which need to be addressed to meet effectively the needs of all the learners.

7.2 The Education and Training Inspectorate will monitor and report on the school's progress in addressing these areas for improvement.

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