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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

Leaney Primary School
Ballymoney

Inspected: November 2007

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Leaney Primary School, a controlled, co-educational school, first opened in 1967. The present building opened in 2006. It is situated on the Intermediate Road, Ballymoney. Most of the children come from the surrounding area and a small number travel from outlying rural areas. At the time of the inspection, approximately 25% of the children were entitled to free school meals.

1.2 The arrangements for the inspection of pastoral care and child protection included the completion of questionnaires by a sample of the parents, as well as meetings with the Board of Governors (governors), and discussions with a group of children from year 6. Prior to the inspection, confidential questionnaires were sent to 109 parents; 40 parents responded, and 18 took the opportunity to write additional comments. The parents indicated, in nearly all cases, strong satisfaction with the work of the school. The few matters raised by the parents in the questionnaires were discussed with the Principal and the governors. The children reported that they felt happy and secure in the school and that they know whom to turn to if they have a concern. The governors expressed their strong support for the work of the school and highlighted the commitment and dedication of the staff. Eleven teachers completed confidential questionnaires; their responses indicated a high level of support for all aspects of the life and work of the school.

1.3 The inspection focused on English, including information and communication technology (ICT), the provision for special educational needs (SEN), the promotion of health and well-being, and the school's arrangements for pastoral care, including child protection.

2. THE QUALITY OF THE CHILDREN'S WORK

2.1 A very positive ethos permeates the life of Leaney Primary School; it is a very happy, caring school with a clear focus on the promotion of good citizenship. The children are well-behaved, respectful to their teachers and to one another, and courteous to visitors. The teachers work hard to create a bright and stimulating learning environment. There are many attractive displays of the children's current and recent work in the corridors and classrooms. The children's personal development is enhanced through their participation in a variety of extra-curricular activities including sport and music.

2.2 The quality of the arrangements for pastoral care and child protection in the school is very good. The school has procedures in place which implement fully the guidance outlined in the relevant Department of Education Circulars. The governors, staff, parents and children are fully aware of the school's procedures and have had the opportunity to contribute to a range of effective policies which guide the work of the school. Among the strengths are:

- the high quality of the pastoral care provision;
- the many strategies being used to promote a sense of responsibility among the children;
- the effective arrangements for reporting any incidents that relate to the pastoral care of the children;

- the procedures used to monitor, evaluate and review the provision for pastoral care and child protection; and
- the effective communication and collaboration with external agencies.

2.3 The school gives very good attention to promoting the health and well-being of the children, including opportunities for healthy eating and physical activity. There are effective policies and programmes in place, for example, the introduction of supervised playground games and line dancing, the availability of filtered water in all resource areas and the provision of healthy breaks and snacks.

2.4 The school has established good links with parents. Through annual reports and a formal meeting with teachers, they are well-informed about their children's progress and about school life generally. The parents are encouraged to become involved in the Association of Friends and Teachers of Leaney Primary School. The school has developed valuable links, including cross-community links, with the other local schools and the wider community.

2.5 Seven children, who have not reached the statutory school age, are enrolled in the Reception provision within a composite class of Reception and year 1 children. They participate well in sustained and purposeful play. The teacher gives a high priority to developing the children's language through discussion, and the rich vocabulary and range of ideas introduced through the teacher's skilful storytelling. The children benefit from the good opportunities for learning in all areas of the pre-school curriculum provided by the high quality of the teaching in the Reception/year 1 class.

2.6 During the inspection, the quality of most of the teaching in the lessons observed was sound or better. In almost half of the lessons, it was good or very good. The most effective lessons were characterised by the successful integration of talking and listening, reading and writing. They included features such as a clear focus on learning, good structure and pace, a range of appropriate resources that built well on the children's prior knowledge, effective questioning that stimulated the children's thinking and extended their understanding and effective links to their learning in other areas of the curriculum. The children responded with enthusiasm and concentration and displayed their creativity and independence. In approximately one-fifth of the lessons observed, however, there were significant areas for improvement in the quality of the teaching. In these instances, the teaching and learning activities were less effective because there was not a clear focus on the intended learning outcomes and the teachers' expectations were not sufficiently high. The learning activities and tasks were insufficiently matched to the varied needs and abilities of the children and were not well managed and as a result, a small number of the children became inattentive. The teaching and learning strategies need to provide the children with appropriate challenge and support, as necessary. The teachers would benefit from more regular opportunities to share and to disseminate consistently the effective practice that exists already in the school. This will require well-focused review, discussion and debate, and improved curricular leadership.

2.7 The play-based learning sessions provided useful opportunities for the children to consolidate important aspects of their learning, including numeracy and literacy. In the best practice, the teachers, through effective interaction and the imaginative use of resources, promoted effectively the children's language and thinking skills and confidence. The

children made choices, co-operated with one another, shared ideas and engaged in extended periods of independent play. In developing further the provision for learning through play and activity-based learning, it would be appropriate to review the programme to ensure a clearer line of progression and greater challenge in the children's learning in the early years. The school development plan (SDP) identifies appropriately the further development of the outdoor physical play provision to extend the children's learning opportunities.

2.8 The teachers plan conscientiously for English. In the best practice, they reflect upon the quality of the children's learning and use their evaluations to inform future planning. Regular opportunities for collaborative planning for English within and across the year groups would help to promote greater consistency and progression in the children's learning experiences.

2.9 Throughout the school, the children benefit from listening to stories and poems; they are encouraged to talk about their experiences at home and in school. In the most effective practice observed, the children had opportunities to express their views and opinions and to take part in effective paired and group discussion. In the less effective practice observed, the lessons were over-directed by the teacher and there was limited opportunity for extended discussion.

2.10 During the inspection, many of the children displayed an interest and enjoyment in reading. By the end of year 7, the majority of the children read with fluency, expression and understanding. The resources available to support reading throughout the school are good. In the early years, the teachers use a range of levelled reading schemes and shared reading books. In addition, a new phonics programme has been introduced this year in order to provide a consistent approach to the development of the children's word-recognition skills. In key stage (KS) 1 and KS2, reading is further developed through regular shared and guided reading sessions, and related reading activities. In a minority of classes, the guided reading sessions were used effectively to enrich the children's language, to deepen their understanding and to promote the development of thinking skills; the reading related tasks were appropriately challenging and provided opportunities for the children to work together collaboratively. In the least effective practice, the reading tasks were not always in line with the children's levels of ability. There is a need for the school to focus more sharply on the development of key reading skills and ensure opportunities for all of the children to engage in a greater variety of associated activities. The good practice, which was observed during the inspection, needs to be extended into all classes.

2.11 The children's early writing is appropriately based on their personal experiences. As the children progress through the school, they are introduced to a range of writing stimuli including the environment, novels, current affairs, newspapers, magazines and appropriately chosen interactive activities. By the end of year 7, the examples of the children's personal writing includes poetry, letter writing, book reviews, descriptions, stories and job applications. The children's standards in writing are generally in line with their abilities. However, in a significant number of classes, there is an over-emphasis on transcription, de-contextualised grammar exercises and the completion of work-sheets. The school has appropriately identified the need to extend the range of writing across the curriculum and, within the past year, has introduced a scheme which has the potential to provide a structure for the progressive and consistent development of writing.

2.12 The teachers mark the children's work regularly. In the majority of classes, marking is of a supportive nature that praises the children's efforts. In a few classes, the teachers are beginning to implement assessment for learning strategies and to advise children on how they can improve their work. The school has already identified this area for development in the current SDP.

2.13 The school maintains information and performance data on the children's progress. A new policy for assessment has recently been drafted that outlines clearly and appropriately the developments needed to improve the whole-school approach to monitoring and evaluating the children's achievements and progress. It is appropriate that the school is working towards a more strategic overview and a consistent and rigorous approach to analysing and using the data to inform the learning and teaching.

2.14 Information and communication technology supports successfully the development of the children's literacy throughout the school, for example, when introducing different writing styles as observed when the children in KS2 used appropriate LearningNI stimuli to develop persuasive writing. The ICT co-ordinator monitors effectively the use of ICT in learning and teaching; she has a strategic direction for the further development of ICT throughout the school, and co-ordinates appropriate staff development opportunities.

2.15 The school is committed to fostering a culture of inclusion for children with special educational needs. A comprehensive policy provides clear guidance on all aspects of the provision. The full-time special educational needs co-ordinator (SENCO) provides additional teaching of literacy skills to children identified on the special needs register; this includes both withdrawal sessions for individuals and small groups as well as in-class support alongside the class teacher. The children's individual education plans set out realistic learning targets that are evaluated regularly; some of the KS2 children have begun to identify personal targets for their work and progress. The teaching provided to those children who require additional support with aspects of their learning is of a high quality. The SENCO is well-organised, very effective in her work with the children and has a clear commitment to the continuous development of special educational needs provision within the school. There is evidence that the children are making satisfactory progress and improvement in reading including the development of strategies for word recognition and word building; they demonstrate confidence in and enjoyment of reading during their small group sessions. There are good links with the parents who are encouraged to be involved in the process of supporting their children's learning through regular meetings, including the exchange of relevant information. During the inspection, the special educational needs classroom assistants provided sensitive and effective learning support to individual children. The school needs to build on the very good practice that exists already, by ensuring that the strategies to develop language and literacy skills are embedded more consistently into normal classroom practice.

2.16 A significant strength of the Principal's leadership is that he leads by example, setting the positive tone throughout the school. He is hard-working and committed to the welfare of the children and staff. The Principal has given considerable dedication to the development of the new school building which provides a stimulating learning environment from which the children benefit significantly. The school's priorities for development are identified through consultation between the Principal, teachers and very supportive governors. The school improvement process is clearly linked to an SDP and associated action plans. The latter, however, need to include the baseline positions and incorporate monitoring, evaluation and

review procedures in order to meet fully the requirements of the School Development Plans Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2005. Consequently, the school needs to develop further the co-ordinators' leadership roles and, in particular, to focus more specifically on monitoring and evaluating the learning experiences and the attainments of the children.

3. CONCLUSION

3.1 The school has significant strengths which include:

- the high quality of the pastoral care;
- the well-behaved children;
- the high quality of the provision for the children with special educational needs;
- the good progress made in the development of ICT to support the children's learning experiences in literacy and across the curriculum;
- the Principal's commitment to the pastoral care of the children and to the well-being of the staff; and
- the governors' active participation in the life and work of the school.

3.2 The areas for improvement include the need:

- to develop the leadership and management roles of the co-ordinators to provide a sharper focus on monitoring and evaluating the quality of teaching and learning and the standards achieved by the children; and
- to ensure suitable progression in the children's experiences in literacy.

3.3 In the areas inspected, the school has strengths in many aspects of its educational and pastoral 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.

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

HEALTH AND SAFETY

- The locking system on the doors leading from the shared cloakroom/toilet areas to the playground needs to be reviewed as a matter of urgency to ensure that the children can exit quickly, if necessary.
- Some of the interactive whiteboards are mounted too high on the walls for the children's use in the foundation stage classrooms.

ACCOMMODATION

- Due to the use of the originally designated staff room as an additional classroom and the Principal's office as a staff room, there is no appropriate provision for the Principal's office.

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