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*The Education and Training Inspectorate -
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Providing Inspection Services for
**Department of Education
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INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

Education and Training Inspectorate

Report of a Focused Inspection

**Lourdes Primary School
Whitehead**

Inspected: February 2007

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Lourdes Primary School is situated on a pleasant elevated site in the town of Whitehead in County Antrim. The majority of the children come from the town and the remainder from the surrounding district. The enrolment has remained fairly constant over the last five years and currently stands at 39. No children are entitled to 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 with all of the children in years 6 and 7. Of the 31 questionnaires issued to the parents, 68% were returned to the Department of Education (DE) and ten contained additional written comments. The responses from the parental questionnaires indicated that the parents were very satisfied with nearly all aspects of the work of the school; in their written comments they praised the professionalism of the teachers and the family atmosphere in the school. A small number of the parents raised concerns about the absences of one of the teachers. This issue was reported to the governors and the Principal. The governors expressed their appreciation of the quality of education and care provided for the children in the school.

1.3 There are many strengths in the arrangements for pastoral care and child protection. The school has procedures in place which implement the guidance outlined in the relevant DE Circulars and has identified appropriately a few minor areas for improvement that it is currently implementing. Among the strengths are a code of conduct for staff, clear written procedures for staff when concerned about a child's welfare, a concern box for the children's use and a recently completed parental audit of pastoral care. The few minor areas for improvement include:

- ensuring that the arrangements for pastoral care and child protection are made known to parents every two years; and
- the completion of training in child protection for staff and governors.

1.4 The inspection focused on the quality of work in English and the effectiveness of the school's special educational needs (SEN) provision. In addition, the report makes reference to the contribution of information and communication technology (ICT) in promoting and supporting learning and teaching in English.

2. THE QUALITY OF THE CHILDREN'S WORK

2.1 There is a warm family atmosphere in the school. The working relationships between the teachers and the children are good. The children are well behaved, courteous and considerate of each other. The learning environment in the school reflects the wide range of work undertaken by the children and the activities that they have participated in. There are many attractive wall displays of the children's work and art.

2.2 The school's programme for the promotion of health and well-being has many strengths. Appropriate policies are in place and attention is given to the development and implementation of programmes, such as the healthy break, the water provision and the cold cookery after-school club, all of which encourage the children to adopt healthy lifestyles. There is evidence of commitment on the part of the staff to promoting healthy eating and to

improving children's eating habits. The school's catering assistant was awarded Dinner Lady of the Year for the North-Eastern Education and Library Board in 2006, having been nominated by the children themselves. The children demonstrate a good understanding of the importance of making healthy life choices. Opportunities are provided for all the children to participate in a range of physical activities, both during and after school.

2.3 The current planning to guide learning and teaching is well structured and helpful. The teachers have identified the need to place a stronger focus on the intended learning outcomes from lessons and more emphasis on active learning approaches to cater for the composite age groups in the classes. The inspection endorses these initiatives.

2.4 The teachers are hard-working and show a high level of commitment to the education and care of the children. The teaching observed was always sound or good. In the best practice the children were purposefully engaged in practical activities that stimulated their interest. For example, the party organised for National Book Week promoted the children's enjoyment of reading. In some instances, a wider range of teaching approaches would better meet the needs of the children.

2.5 Most children are well motivated during lessons and show good levels of interest and perseverance in completing the tasks set. They work well in pairs and in groups. On a few occasions, the work provided for the children was insufficiently challenging.

2.6 The children's written work is marked thoroughly, with encouraging comments showing how improvements could be made. There is a clear emphasis on celebrating the children's successes. The Principal is currently putting in place a system to record the children's progress as they move through the school.

2.7 A part-time teacher for SEN works with the children requiring additional and individual support with their work. The class teachers, by using observation, monitoring and standardised testing, identify the children needing extra support. Close links between the teacher for SEN and the class teachers are maintained. The ethos is supportive and constructive and there are good working relationships between staff and children. The children benefit from this support and are making good progress. Intervention strategies introduced at an earlier stage to the children would further enhance their progress.

2.8 The programme for English provides a broad outline of the work to be covered in each year group. In all lessons, the children are given opportunities to participate orally through question and answer sessions. The children have good oral skills and talk confidently in group situations. Generally, the children's reading skills are developed regularly and systematically, though they need to read from a wider range of books that provide greater challenge and stimulus. The teachers use a range of teaching strategies and resources to support and meet the interests and needs of individual children, and to address the age range in the two classes.

2.9 The children have good opportunities to write for a range of audiences and for different purposes, for example, during the inspection they wrote stories for inclusion in a newspaper. Good examples of differing types of writing were observed. There is good progression in the children's writing skills as they move through the school and standards are mostly good. The children need to become more reflective about the quality of their writing by, for example, comparing their work with that of the authors they are familiar with.

2.10 The use of ICT as a teaching tool to develop the children's language and literacy skills is generally underdeveloped. The school has prepared useful documentation setting out the software packages, which will be used in each year group. This documentation will be helpful in promoting the children's communication skills. Some good use of word-processing packages to develop the children's writing skills were observed during the inspection.

2.11 The Principal has been in post for just over a year. She provides strong and effective leadership and has a clear vision for the development of the school. She is hard-working and committed, and has responded enthusiastically to the many challenges faced by the school. She has developed good working relationships with the children, the parents and the wider community. The Principal has devised a wide range of required relevant new school policies since she took up post. The children enjoy the frequent school trips and extra-curricular activities that are provided. The current school development plan, which includes detailed action plans involving all the school staff, is comprehensive, wide-ranging and helpful.

2.12 The school's accommodation is good and is cleaned and maintained to a high standard. The building supervisor contributes significantly to the positive overall school ethos.

2.13 The strengths of the school include:

- the friendly, caring ethos;
- the good behaviour of the children;
- the enthusiasm and self-confidence of the children;
- the leadership and vision of the Principal;
- the provision for SEN;
- the support of the governors;
- the school's commitment to the promotion of the health and well-being of the children;
- the emphasis on celebrating the children's successes; and
- the wide range of extra-curricular activities.

2.14 The areas for improvement include:

- the need to raise standards in the children's literacy skills by widening the range of teaching approaches adopted in lessons; and
- the wider use of ICT throughout the school to cater for the children's needs.

3. **CONCLUSION**

3.1 In the areas inspected, the school has strengths in many aspects of its educational and pastoral provision. The inspection has identified a few important areas for improvement, 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.

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