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*The Education and Training Inspectorate -
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Education and Training Inspectorate

Report of a Focused Inspection

Newtownards Model Primary School

Inspected: January 2009

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 SCHOOL CONTEXT

Newtownards Model Primary School is located on the Scrabo Road in the centre of Newtownards. The children come mainly from within the town and represent a wide range of backgrounds and abilities. The current enrolment of the school stands at 383. At the time of the inspection, approximately 25% of the children were entitled to free school meals and 22% of the children were on the special educational needs (SEN) register. Recently, the school has undergone a major refurbishment; the quality of the accommodation is excellent.

1.2 FOCUS

The inspection focused 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.

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

One hundred and twenty-nine questionnaires were issued to parents; approximately 47% of these were returned to the Department of Education (DE). Seventeen returns contained additional written comments. Most of the responses indicated a very high level of satisfaction with the provision in the school. In particular, the parents highlighted the caring, happy learning environment, the opportunities afforded to the children to fulfil their full potential, the leadership of the Principal and Vice-principal and the hard-working teaching and non-teaching staff. An analysis of the questionnaires and the written comments made by the parents and the staff were shared with the Principal and the governors.

Eleven teachers completed the confidential online questionnaire. Their responses were highly affirmative of the work of the school.

The governors spoke very positively about the welcoming atmosphere within the school, the commitment and professionalism of the Principal and Vice-principal and the staff's hard work in the interests of the children and the wider community.

During discussions with the year 6 children, they spoke enthusiastically about the school and the support provided by the teachers. They said they feel safe and secure in school and mentioned, in particular, the playground rules and the raising of their self-esteem through, for example, their involvement in the playground 'Friendship Stop'. The children know who to speak to if they have any concerns.

1.4 PASTORAL CARE

The quality of the arrangements for pastoral care in the school is excellent and a significant strength of the school; the Principal and the staff are dedicated to the children in their care. The classroom assistants, office staff, caretaker and cleaning staff and other ancillary personnel contribute significantly to promoting and maintaining a pleasant working environment for the children. The teachers have high expectations of the children, encouraging them to be well-behaved and mannerly and to take pride in their work; the teachers' attitude to their own work and to the children's learning makes them good role-models. The children are friendly and courteous, and respond well to the staff's expectations; their behaviour is excellent. The school regularly awards achievement incentives to encourage the children's sense of self-esteem and self-confidence. The children, through the School Council, make a valuable input to the life and work of the school; their views and opinions on a range of issues are sought and valued.

A large number of children benefit from the opportunity to participate in a wide range of extra-curricular activities which include a breakfast club and music, drama and sporting activities. In addition, their learning and social development are enhanced through regular visits to places of educational interest and visitors to the school. The school contributes to several selected charities.

1.5 CHILD PROTECTION

The school has comprehensive arrangements in place for safeguarding children. These arrangements reflect the guidance issued by DE.

1.6 HEALTHY EATING AND PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

The school gives good attention to promoting healthy eating and physical activity, for example fruit breaks and a popular breakfast club. The area for improvement identified includes the need to describe the whole-school healthy eating programmes, as these develop, in a "Food in School" policy.

2. ACHIEVEMENTS AND STANDARDS

2.1 LEARNING

The children settle quickly to their work; they are highly co-operative and well motivated to learn. In the foundation stage (FS) there is an appropriate emphasis on promoting independent thinking and learning; the children are actively engaged in the learning process, have opportunities to interact effectively with one another and to apply their learning in a variety of contexts. This good practice should be disseminated and further developed throughout the school.

The majority of the children make good progress in their learning. There is a small number of children, however, who would benefit from more challenging learning tasks and activities.

2.2 ENGLISH AND LITERACY

The quality of provision for English and literacy is good. The school has put in place a range of effective strategies to target improvement in standards by the end of key stage (KS) 1. The analysis of data is used to target improvement in each key stage and there is excellent support for those who require additional support for their learning including the Catch Up project. By the end of KS2, the standards achieved in English are higher than other schools with similar free school meals entitlement.

In all key stages, the children are motivated and keen to talk about their work. In the FS and KS1 the children have good opportunities to use language to explore and express their ideas through play-based learning, role-play, whole class discussion, paired and group work. By KS2 the children can ask and give extended responses to questions and they work well in groups and in pairs to share and listen to ideas. In the more effective practice, the children are able to think for themselves, speak confidently, question and challenge each other's responses. In the less effective practice, the quality of the children's talking and listening is restricted by over-direction by the teacher and passive learning.

The children are taught reading through a structured reading scheme. In the FS the children respond positively to guided reading sessions and there are good opportunities in the play sessions to promote language development. By the end of KS1 the children can read with increasing fluency and understanding and express an enjoyment of reading. In KS2 the children have good opportunities to read fiction and non-fiction texts and in the more effective practice, the children indicate an understanding of the characters, plot and setting and have a genuine enthusiasm for reading. The teachers plan imaginative follow-on activities and use effective open-ended questions to develop the children's thinking in response to their reading. In the less effective practice, the children spend too much time on language tasks which do not provide sufficient challenge; the teachers' closed questioning limits the children's creative thinking.

In the FS the writing occurs naturally from the children's interests and experiences through effective strategies such as the use of play dough to shape words, ICT software and creative writing in play-based learning. By the end of KS1 the children are developing independence in writing and can write in different forms including poems, letters, reports, stories and instructions. The children develop their writing from stimulating work in other areas of the curriculum; for example the children studied examples of Russian architecture and textiles to produce a drama and a story. This work is built upon in KS2 as the children can write for a wider range of purposes and audiences and with increasing accuracy and proficiency. In the more effective practice, the children are interested writers who are keen to express their ideas, feelings and communicate information in a creative way, and the children use ICT to plan, draft, edit and present their work. In the less effective practice, insufficient emphasis is placed on the development of extended and independent writing across the curriculum: for example, the children's creativity and fluency are restricted by the completion of exercises which only allow for a minimum written response and lack challenge.

Information and communication technology is used well by the teachers in the support of the children's literacy. The learning support team (LST) use ICT effectively in providing support for the children in an increasingly independent manner. In addition, the timetabled ICT suite, the school's website and interactive whiteboards in all the classes enhances the children's learning in English.

2.3 MATHEMATICS AND NUMERACY

There are many strengths within the school's numeracy provision. The programme for mathematics is suitably broad and provides the children with a wide range of experiences. Children engage in a variety of problem-solving and investigative mathematics and are given opportunities to work collaboratively with their peers in pairs and small groups.

Teachers make good use of a range of practical equipment to develop a secure understanding of mathematical concepts. In the FS, for example, children are able to use non standard measures to investigate the weight of common objects, while at KS1 and KS2 structured apparatus helps the children develop a secure understanding of place value.

Throughout the school ICT is used effectively to support learning and teaching in numeracy. During the inspection, children from year 1 upwards were able to access websites independently; interactive whiteboards were used imaginatively to motivate children and develop mathematical thinking, and in some classes children engaged with computer games closely linked to the stated learning intentions for the lesson.

The co-ordinator provides very effective leadership in numeracy. She supports her colleagues in reviewing, developing and implementing the curriculum, providing a wide range of useful and inspiring resources and monitoring and evaluating the children's mathematical learning through, for example, classroom visits and sampling of children's work. The school recognises the need to support those children who experience difficulty with mathematics and have put in place a full time numeracy support teacher who provides excellent support for the children through a system of individual or small group withdrawal sessions.

The school has appropriately identified the need to review long-term planning for mathematics to ensure progression in the children's learning. The Education and Training Inspectorate endorses this as a priority. It will be important that, in doing so, the teachers ensure sufficient challenge and pace to meet the needs of the more able children, particularly in KS2.

Overall the standards in mathematics in this school are good. During the inspection children in years 4 and 7 demonstrated their ability to think mathematically across all areas of the numeracy programme.

3. THE QUALITY OF PROVISION FOR LEARNING

3.1 PLANNING

The teachers plan consistently and work collaboratively in year groups. There are clear links between the long-term planning and the school development plan (SDP). The quality of medium-term planning varies across the school. In the best practice, learning intentions, learning and teaching strategies and activities have been clearly identified. In the less effective practice, learning and teaching strategies need to be more fully developed if planning is to guide and inform classroom practice adequately.

As the staff continue to develop their planning more emphasis should be given to the intended learning outcomes inherent in the lessons. The teachers have begun to evaluate the effectiveness of their work across the curriculum. These evaluations need to be developed further to enable the teachers to assess more fully the quality of learning and teaching within their classes.

3.2 TEACHING

During the inspection, the majority of the teaching observed was good or better; a minority of the lessons observed were deemed to be outstanding. The effective practice included the well paced and structured lessons, the promotion of independent learning among the children and the effective integration of ICT to support learning in both literacy and numeracy. The school has made very good progress in embracing the underlying principles of the Northern Ireland Curriculum and the teachers employ a wide range of teaching strategies to develop active learning.

3.3 ASSESSMENT

There are appropriate procedures and records for keeping the parents informed about their child's progress, which include written reports and formal parent-teacher consultations. In addition, the parents are encouraged to meet with the teachers, both on a formal and informal basis, to discuss their child's educational and pastoral needs.

The teachers use a suitable range of internal and external tests to attain an overview of the children's performance, to guide the planning for learning support and to set realistic targets for improvement and attainment in literacy and numeracy. The school is making effective use of performance and benchmarking data and has identified underachievement by boys, and developed intervention strategies which have been successful in promoting improvement.

The school, through its own processes of self-evaluation, has reviewed the arrangements for administering internal standardised tests, and introduced a data-handling software package to track and measure the children's progress. The Principal has a clear understanding of the purpose of assessment, and he is making good progress in implementing an appropriate and manageable assessment system to monitor and evaluate the children's progress.

The children's work is marked regularly. In the best practice, the teachers mark and annotate the work, indicating how, if necessary, it could be improved. The school has appropriately identified this as an area for further development.

3.4 SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS

Approximately 22% of the children are on the SEN Register and 2% have statements of SEN. The school is strongly committed to meeting the needs of these children and the inclusive approach emphasises the education of the children with special educational needs alongside their peers in the classroom.

The arrangements for SEN, under the excellent leadership of the special educational needs co-ordinator (SENCO) and the Learning Support Team (LST), are systematic and effective. The class teachers liaise closely with the SENCO and the LST to develop detailed education plans which set out realistic targets and strategies to address each child's needs. These

targets are reviewed regularly and shared with the parents. The teachers meet the needs of the children in a sensitive and supportive manner, providing suitably differentiated activities which take account of the range of abilities within each class. The arrangement whereby the teachers are responsible for setting targets, in liaison with the SENCO and LST, and implementing the strategies, is a strong feature of the success of the SEN provision.

Literacy and numeracy support are provided for the children through a combination of withdrawal sessions, in class support and specific programmes. The SENCO and LST, together with the class teachers, monitor and review the children's progress on a regular basis and there is evidence to show that the actions taken have resulted in improvements in the children's learning. In the learning support classes the teachers demonstrate a strong commitment to the children and their needs, and the relationships between the teachers and the children are excellent. In the work observed, the children were supported very effectively by the teacher using a variety of strategies, including multi-sensory approaches, to develop and support the children's learning. The children are enthusiastic about their work and are motivated by the practical work and by the good use of ICT.

Good links are maintained with various external support agencies and these provide valuable assistance to individual children. The school deploys and utilises the excellent support provided by the classroom assistants efficiently.

4. LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

The Principal provides excellent leadership and has an appropriate vision for the school. He sets very high standards for himself and the whole-school community and is thoroughly committed and dedicated to providing the highest possible standards of education for all the children. He is highly reflective in his work and fosters a culture of self-evaluation leading to improvement throughout the school. The improvement process is clearly linked to a well constructed SDP. There are very good opportunities for consultation about the SDP within the school community; the parents, governors and children are involved in the process of school improvement. The hard-working Vice-principal is highly professional and well-informed in his work. Both the Vice-principal and the senior management team (SMT) support the Principal well in his work and contribute to the overall effectiveness of the school.

5. CONCLUSION

5.1 The strengths of the school include:

- the high quality of the child protection and pastoral care;
- the quality of the majority of the teaching observed which was good or better, with a significant minority of the lessons being outstanding;
- the good standards achieved by the children in English and mathematics by the end of KS2 and the very good use made of ICT in promoting and supporting learning and teaching;
- the good links and communication established with the parents and external agencies;

- the provision for special educational needs; and
- the excellent leadership of the Principal, ably assisted by his Vice-principal and SMT.

In the areas inspected, the quality of education provided by this school is very good. The school is meeting very effectively the educational and pastoral needs of the children; and has demonstrated its capacity for sustained self-improvement.

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