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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

Park School
Belfast

Inspected: September 2008

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Park School is situated on the Ravenhill Road in Belfast and provides education for 109 pupils with moderate learning difficulties.

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. One hundred and two parental questionnaires were issued and 43 were returned. Of these, 15 parents took the opportunity to submit a written response. The parents commented that the management and staff were friendly and caring and that their children were happy in school. A few parents raised specific concerns, for example, in relation to the absence of therapy provision in the school, which were discussed with the Principal. The pupils, in discussion with the inspection team, indicated their awareness of the arrangements to ensure their safety and security in school.

1.3 The focus of the inspection was on the quality of planning for and management of individual needs including the standards achieved by the pupils, the quality of the provision for learning, the leadership and management of the school 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. Park School is a good school. It has undergone significant and wide-ranging changes since the previous inspection. The Principal has worked tirelessly with senior staff to raise standards and the extent of the changes has had a significant and positive impact on staff and pupils. The appointment of new staff to key management positions has refocused the staff's energy and enabled all to play their part in maintaining the very good standards the pupils achieve across a range of subjects.

2.2 Despite a number of deficiencies in the accommodation, the staff provide challenging experiences which engage and motivate the pupils at a level which ensures good success and motivates further progress. Many achieve well across a range of appropriate accreditation and the school has developed good links with a range of providers. The school would need to engage further with Belfast Metropolitan College to ensure that the pupils attending the college achieve accreditation standards at a similar level to those they achieve at school.

2.3 The school gives good attention to promoting healthy eating and physical activity, for example, the promotion of water and links with external agencies. The areas for improvement identified include the need to develop a healthy eating/health education policy and explore ways to continue to encourage healthy breaks and lunch boxes.

2.4 The inspection findings indicate the following achievements and standards:

- the strong emphasis on helping the pupils to progress in appropriate external accreditation, and the good quality support for transition at all levels;

- the willing engagement in lessons as the pupils achieve most of the targets identified in their individual education plans and demonstrate well the ability to work individually and in groups;
- the good progress in English, mathematics and technology and design (T&D), with a majority achieving entry level standards in mathematics and T&D; a majority could achieve better in science and a minority would benefit from speech and language support to improve their articulation and communication skills;
- the very high skills in information and communication technology (ICT); this is a particular strength of the school; and
- the very good pupil behaviour; there are a few instances of low-level disturbance and no suspensions and expulsions.

3. **QUALITY OF PROVISION FOR LEARNING**

3.1 The quality of teaching overall is sound and very good to excellent in almost 60% of lessons. The new management structure has empowered staff to develop good quality planning, recording and teaching across the school. The school is well placed to move further on this progress. The inspectors observed good and on occasions (around 16%) excellent teaching. Strengths include the use of computers as a tool for learning in many subjects. Consequently, the pupils are engaged well in learning and achieve well. The classroom assistants make an excellent contribution to the success of lessons because of the support they offer individual pupils.

3.2 The staff has embraced the Revised Northern Ireland Curriculum, and the new KS4 vocational curriculum and year 13 programme are appropriately matched to the needs, interests, vocational and social development of the pupils. The clear focus on learning outcomes and thorough analysis of individual pupil assessment data has helped the staff to sharpen the quality of their planning, to set appropriate targets for the pupils and to review and chart progress through the six-weekly planners.

3.3 The quality of the arrangements for pastoral care in the school is very good and is characterised by:

- the high standard of the pastoral care provision;
- the very caring and supportive ethos;
- the regular consultation and involvement of the pupils in decision making within the school;
- the polite and well-behaved pupils;
- the individualised help and support given to the pupils who have been ill on their return to school; and
- the quality of relationships throughout the school.

The school has satisfactory arrangements in place for safeguarding children. These arrangements broadly reflect the guidance issued by the relevant Department. The following minor areas need to be addressed. The training of the deputy designated teacher needs to be updated as planned and the newly-appointed designated governor needs to complete child protection training as planned.

3.4 The school outreach service is highly regarded by those schools who receive support. The new head of service has made a significant contribution since her recent appointment and there continues to be significant demand for the service. The teachers are hard-working and have good working relationships with the schools they visit. The service to the pupils in grant maintained, grammar and integrated schools within the Belfast Education and Library Board (BELB) area is to be curtailed by the BELB at the end of October 2008. It is important that the Department of Education (DE) and the BELB clarify the position regarding the funding for outreach provision from Park School for pupils in grant maintained, grammar and integrated schools.

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

- the teachers' ability to assess the pupils' achievements formally on a regular basis including good use of ICT; co-ordinators record, monitor and analyse these assessments and use their findings well to plan specific interventions;
- the effective and rigorous target-setting systems across the school which identify and develop the most important key skills in all subjects;
- the carefully planned introduction of the Revised Northern Ireland Curriculum at a level appropriately matched to the pupils' needs and abilities; and
- the excellent use of ICT as a tool to motivate and engage pupils.

4. LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

4.1 The Principal, ably supported by her Vice-principal, provides very good leadership. In the last year, three senior management positions have been appointed and this has brought significant benefits to the management team. The Principal has been in post for 13 years and has moved the school through a series of important developments. She is well informed about all aspects of school life and her work is characterised by commitment to the needs of the pupils and insistence on high standards and expectations for them. The management team have a good strategic overview of the school and its outreach programme and plan well for future developments. They are well informed about the quality of teaching and learning and have effective systems in place to systematically monitor and evaluate the pupils' progress.

4.2 The improvement process is clearly linked to a well constructed school development plan (SDP) which has many strengths. There are very good opportunities for consultation about the SDP within the school community and good quality staff development. Policies and programmes are in place, for example in ICT, literacy and mathematics, which effectively support a culture of school improvement. The school gives very good attention

and meets fully the requirements of the School Development Plans Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2005. The school exited from the school support programme in 2006 and since then has continued to make good progress. The school is now in a position to promote confidently further improvement.

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

- the very good leadership provided by the Principal, ably supported by her Vice-principal and management team;
- the good working relationships among staff at all levels;
- the strong emphasis on empowering senior staff and co-ordinators to develop their interests and areas of responsibility through effective staff development and resourcing; and
- the effective SDP, strongly focused on sustaining ongoing improvements in learning and teaching.

5. **OVERALL EFFECTIVENESS**

5.1 The overall effectiveness of the school shows strengths in many aspects of the areas inspected. The inspection has identified the following strengths:

- the good leadership of the Principal in developing the school over a sustained period of improvement;
- the good quality of the teaching throughout the school;
- the good behaviour of the pupils and the good quality working relationships amongst the staff, the parents and the pupils;
- the high expectations which the staff have for their pupils and the motivated and diligent approach to their work which the pupils respond well to;
- the good standards achieved across a wide range of appropriate accreditation and the strong attention paid to preparation for adult and working life; and
- the excellent use of ICT across the curriculum.

6. **AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT**

6.1 The inspection findings indicate that the following areas for improvement need to be addressed for the staff, led by the management team. There is a need:

- to engage further with Belfast Metropolitan College regarding specific 14-16 provision in order to ensure that the pupils achieve better in the college; and

- to clarify with DE and the BELB the position regarding the funding for outreach provision from Park School for the pupils in grant maintained, grammar and integrated schools within the BELB area.

7. **CONCLUSION**

7.1 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 learners and has demonstrated its capacity for sustained self-improvement.

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