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## **Education and Training Inspectorate**

### **Report of a Focused Inspection**

**Riverside School  
Antrim**

**Inspected: November 2007**

## CONTENTS

<b>Section</b>		<b>Page</b>
	STATISTICAL INFORMATION	
1.	INTRODUCTION	1
2.	ACHIEVEMENTS AND STANDARDS	1
3.	QUALITY OF PROVISION FOR LEARNING	2
4.	LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT	3
5.	OVERALL EFFECTIVENESS	4
6.	AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT	4
7.	CONCLUSION	5



## **1. INTRODUCTION**

1.1 Riverside School, built in 1999, is situated on a spacious site in the centre of a housing estate in Antrim town. The school provides education for pupils aged three to 19 years who have severe learning difficulties. The inspection took place during a time of ongoing industrial action called by the Northern Ireland Public Service Alliance. The two senior classes in the school were on a planned residential trip to an outdoor centre and were observed at the centre during the inspection. One teacher and two assistants support ten pupils aged 12-18 years in Outreach provision in nearby Muckamore Hospital. These pupils have significant learning difficulties which are compounded by emotional and behavioural difficulties; all have a history of challenging behaviour and some 50% have autism with severe social and communication problems.

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 a group of pupils from across the school. Twenty-six of the 55 parental questionnaires issued were returned to the Department of Education (DE) and sixteen of these included a written comment. Almost all of the parental responses were very positive and supportive of the work of the school; the very few concerns raised by the parents, mainly in relation to insufficiency of therapy provision, were brought to the attention of the Principal. At the meeting with the governors, they expressed their commitment to and support for the school, and commented particularly on the very positive and caring ethos. In discussions with the inspection team, the pupils indicated that they felt safe and secure in school and that they knew to whom to turn if they needed help or had worries about their care and well-being.

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 Overall, Riverside School provides a sound education for its pupils. The inspection found many aspects of its provision to be of a good standard, and in particular, the quality and delivery of the leavers' programme and the work with the pupils who have profound and multiple learning difficulties (PMLD). For the majority of the pupils, progress is steady; for a small minority, more could be done to promote their learning. Pupils at the Muckamore Hospital site have access to education and respond well, when interested and motivated, to activities which are practical and short.

2.2 The school gives very good attention to promoting health and well-being including opportunities for healthy eating and physical activity. There are effective policies and programmes in place, for example, fruit eating days, cooking classes, access to drinking water and discussion of healthy lunchtime choices, which encourage the pupils to adopt healthy lifestyles.

2.3 The inspection findings indicate the following achievements and standards:

- the good responses to their teachers from the majority of the pupils who engage well, and who learn and benefit from the activities planned for and presented to them;

- the confidence of the older pupils who have good self-esteem and who communicate effectively with their teachers, peers and families;
- the promotion of the pupils' overall health and well-being throughout the school;
- the well-planned and organised arrangements which enable the older pupils to prepare well for the transition from school to adult and working life; and
- the positive responses of the pupils in the PMLD classes who are learning to communicate well in the imaginative and creative sessions presented to them by their teachers.

### **3. QUALITY OF PROVISION FOR LEARNING**

3.1 The ethos of the school is very welcoming, warm, supportive and friendly. The pupils are cared for and their successes and achievements are recognised and celebrated. The majority of the teaching is of good or better quality. Where the teaching had major strengths, in about 45% of the lessons observed, the pupils were fully engaged in well-planned, interesting and enjoyable tasks. In this best practice, the innovative and practical activities were underpinned by good quality planning, assessment and review; the pupils were encouraged to participate and were highly motivated. The staff have worked well together to develop good quality planning for learning; this should be followed up with a whole-school focus on improving the quality of the learning and teaching across the school through a strong focus on discussion and regular debate on how learning and teaching can be improved further in the school in the interests of the pupils. There is a need to discuss and share the good practice in order to improve the quality of the provision for all the pupils.

3.2 The members of the school staff in Muckamore Hospital have formed trusting relationships with the pupils and use their intimate knowledge of the pupils' needs to plan a curriculum which encourages participation and enjoyment in learning, and, for some, preparation for reintegration into their school.

3.3 The quality of the arrangements for pastoral care and child protection has important strengths. The school has procedures in place which implement the guidance outlined in the relevant DE Circulars and has identified appropriately a few areas for improvement which it is currently implementing. Among the strengths are the quality of the relationships throughout the school, the caring and supportive ethos and the effective communication with parents; the few areas for improvement include the need to consult further with parents, to ensure the arrangements for pastoral care and child protection are made known to parents at least once every two years and to monitor and evaluate further the effectiveness of the pastoral care and child protection policies in the classroom.

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

- the good start made at whole-school level in the development of comprehensive, good quality planning for learning to address the needs of the pupils;

- the very good quality of almost half of the teaching, with about 10% of the lessons judged to be of outstanding quality;
- the imaginative and creative approaches to involving pupils in the PMLD classes in multi-sensory experiences;
- the good focus on utilising creative and expressive curricular subjects, such as music, to engage the pupils in enjoyable and worthwhile learning experiences;
- the effective links and communication between home and school through, for example, the use of the daily home/school diary;
- the positive working relationships amongst teachers, classroom assistants, pupils, other staff and outside agencies; and
- the contribution of others in the school, and the caretaker in particular, who interact well with the pupils and encourage them to communicate.

#### **4. LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT**

4.1 The Principal shows strong commitment and dedication to the school. She manages the day-to-day procedures well and there is a clear system of operation with established routines to ensure the smooth running of the school. She is supported by the Vice-principal, the staff, the parents and the governors. Much work has been undertaken to identify relevant priorities for the school and the school's development plan outlines sensible areas for improvement. There is a developing commitment to action planning and to monitoring and evaluation of the pupils' attainments and experiences. There are effective policies and programmes in place which support a positive learning environment. The areas for improvement include the need to apply more rigour and detail to action planning in order to focus more on opening up professional discussion on the achievements of the pupils and on bringing about improvement through effective monitoring and evaluation of the quality of the provision.

4.2 The Principal and the management team have begun to establish a culture of self-evaluation; this should be developed further to raise the standard of teaching and learning through, for example, observation, discussion and dissemination of the examples of very good quality and innovative practice in the school.

4.3 Notwithstanding the conscientious efforts of the education staff to provide for the education of pupils in Muckamore Hospital, there is a need for a more integrative approach to planning the daily routines of the work with these pupils across the health, behavioural and educational disciplines.

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

- the commitment and dedication of the Principal, supported by the Vice-principal;
- the orderly, systematic, well managed and established school routines;

- the staff development programme which shows strong commitment to utilising the expertise and skills of each member of staff and which provides good opportunities for further training and professional development; and
- the committed and supportive governors who are kept fully informed and involved in the work of the school.

## 5. **OVERALL EFFECTIVENESS**

5.1 The overall effectiveness of the school shows strengths in many aspects of the areas inspected.

5.2 The inspection has identified the following strengths:

- the warm, secure and caring ethos and the good quality of the provision for the pastoral care of the pupils;
- the good quality of the school's programme for the promotion of the pupils' health and well-being;
- the work to date in developing a common approach to planning for learning;
- the very good quality of the teaching in some classes in the school;
- the high quality of the school's programme for transition and leavers and for the pupils with PMLD; and
- the strong support of the parents and the members of the Board of Governors for the work of the school.

## 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:

- to further develop, in line with priorities already identified by the school, a more systematic, formal and documented approach to the processes for monitoring and evaluating the quality of learning and teaching to lead to further improvement; and
- to identify and disseminate the effective practice across the whole school in order to promote greater consistency in the quality and effectiveness of learning and teaching.

## 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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