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*The Education and Training Inspectorate -
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**Department of Education
Department for Employment and Learning
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INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

Education and Training Inspectorate

Report of a Focused Inspection

**Rosstulla School
Newtownabbey**

Inspected: May 2008

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STATISTICAL INFORMATION (SPECIAL SCHOOLS)

1.1 i. **School: Rosstulla School Newtownabbey**

iii. **Date of Inspection: W/B 12.05.08**

ii. **School Reference Number: 331-0018**

iv. **Nature of Inspection: Focused**

1.2

School Year	2003/04	2004/05	2005/06	2006/07	2007/08
Total Enrolment	150	160	161	172	162

The enrolment for the current year is the figure on the day of notification of inspection. For previous years it is the figure in the annual return to the Department of Education.

1.3 Number of Pupils in Outreach Programme: 0

1.4 Average Attendance for the Previous School Year: 91.5%

1.5 i. Number of Teachers in School: 21 on Outreach Programme: 0
(including the Principal and p/t teachers)
(f/t equivalent = 25 teaching hours)

ii. PTR (pupil/teacher ratio): 7.7

iii. Average Class Size: 10

iv. Number of Classroom Assistants: 14

v. Ancillary Support:
Number of Hours per week:

Clerical Support: 46

vi. Percentage of children in receipt of free school meals: 38%

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Rosstulla School is situated on the Jordanstown Road in Newtownabbey and shares a campus with Thornfield House School. The school provides education for 162 pupils who have 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, meetings with representatives from the Board of Governors (governors), meetings with two groups of pupils from across the school and a presentation from some of the school prefects and members of the Student Council. Each family received a questionnaire; approximately half of those issued were returned to the Department of Education (DE) and 36 of these included a written comment. Almost all of the parental responses were very positive and supportive of the school. A very small number of parents raised specific concerns about therapy provision; two parental responses raised other issues which were shared with the Principal and the governors. At the meeting with the governors, they expressed their strong support for the school and outlined clearly their involvement in its management. The pupils, in discussion with the inspection team, indicated their awareness of arrangements to ensure their safety and security in school.

1.3 The focus of the inspection was on 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. Rosstulla School is a very good school where the pupils are highly motivated and achieve well. By the time they reach leaving age, pupils' successes are reflected in the range of accreditation and high standards achieved. The pupils develop very good personal and social skills, demonstrate an increasing confidence and transfer successfully to post-school provision in adult and working life, particularly when supported by a developing network of external links.

2.2 The school gives excellent attention to promoting health and well-being, including opportunities for promoting healthy eating and physical activity. There are effective policies and programmes in place, for example, the wide range of extra-curricular sporting activities and the well planned leisure studies programme, all of which encourage the pupils to make informed lifestyle choices and develop their sporting interests outside school.

2.3 The inspection findings indicate the following achievements and standards:

- the very well-motivated pupils who are fully involved in lessons through a wide variety of active and practical learning experiences;
- the excellent attention paid to the promotion of the pupils' health and well-being throughout the school;

- the sharp focus on developing in the pupils high levels of independence, self-esteem, and confidence and the effective transfer of social and life skills in a variety of contexts;
- the high expectation of the staff for the pupils' successes, and the range of, and high standards achieved in, external accreditation; and
- the excellent preparation for transition to adult and working life through the careers education, information, advice and guidance programme which could be further enhanced through joint planning between the school and the colleges of further education to ensure that the good work of the school is built upon.

3. **QUALITY OF PROVISION FOR LEARNING**

3.1 The majority of the teaching seen during the inspection had major strengths, and was of outstanding quality in about 10% of the lessons. In the most effective lessons, there is a strong practical approach where the pupils are fully aware of the intended learning and often participate in setting and reviewing their own targets; for example, in the development of thinking skills and independent learning often transferred to other contexts outside the classrooms. A strong feature of the majority of the lessons, and strongly evident in the creative and expressive curriculum, is the positive ambience in which pupils and staff, including the learning support assistants, show respect for one another within a very innovative, creative and enjoyable range of experiences.

3.2 The curriculum is broad and relevant with a strong emphasis on the creative and expressive arts and on personal and social development. Generally, the teachers' planning is of high quality and the lessons are well-resourced. It is important to develop the school's capacity to disseminate best practice within the school and the wider learning community. The school has appropriately identified the need to develop further the process of individual education planning and the inspection endorses this review to date as an effective model.

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 emphasis placed on developing the pupils' personal and social skills, the analysis of data regarding incidents of bullying and of absenteeism, the postcards sent home to parents detailing exceptional achievements of pupils and the development of a school-based care team to address the needs of those pupils who require additional support.

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

- the exemplary behaviour of pupils and their strong sense of belonging to the school community;
- the thorough knowledge by the staff of the pupils and the positive climate for learning and achievement that permeates the school;
- the good quality of the majority of the teaching and the examples of excellent practice;

- the range of effective teaching methods used, and the capacity of the staff to provide a wide range of learning opportunities and practical activities;
- the clear focus on intended learning which is shared with the pupils;
- the effective contribution of the learning support staff;
- the very good progress made in the development of information and communication technology (ICT) to enhance and extend learning across the curriculum in response to the ICT survey visit; and
- the high quality of the caretaking and cleaning throughout the school building.

4. LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

4.1 Through the drive and dedication of the Principal, a great deal has been achieved. There is excellent collegiality and team-work in the leadership team. The Principal, ably supported by the two very effective Vice-principals, has developed a clear shared vision with the staff for the role and the future development of the school. She has developed very effective systems to empower curriculum and pastoral leaders and has also developed a framework to enable staff to monitor and evaluate effectively the quality of the provision.

4.2 The Principal provides effective leadership and management of the school. The improvement process is clearly linked to a well-constructed school development plan. There are excellent opportunities for consultation about the plan within the school community as well as effective target-setting and very good quality staff development. Policies and programmes are in place which effectively support a culture of school improvement. The school gives excellent attention and meets fully the requirements of the School Development Plans Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2005.

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

- the high quality strategic leadership provided by the Principal, very ably supported by the two Vice-principals;
- the very strong commitment and dedication of the Principal, the leadership team and the staff;
- the clear sense of team-work in both the leadership and the various curriculum teams;
- the strong emphasis on empowering staff and co-ordinators to develop interests and areas of responsibility through effective staff development; and
- the strong links developed with, for example, the parents, the governors and the local community.

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 strategic leadership and the strong commitment and dedication of the Principal and the leadership team and their high expectations for the pupils;
- the excellent behaviour, attitudes and motivation displayed by the pupils;
- the strong sense of collegiality which permeates the school and the excellent opportunities provided for professional development within a culture of embracing change;
- the consistently good quality of the majority of the teaching;
- the strong emphasis on the pupils' personal development, social and life skills; and
- the strong support from the parents, the governors and the community.

6. AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT

6.1 Building on the good practice in many aspect of the work of the school, there is a need to:

- develop further the opportunities for joint planning between the school and the colleges of further education to ensure that the work of the school is progressively built upon and courses are more accessible to pupils with literacy difficulties; and
- to continue to develop the school's capacity to disseminate best practice within the school and the wider learning community.

7. CONCLUSION

7.1 In the areas inspected, the quality of education provided in this school is very good. The educational and pastoral needs of the pupils are being well met. The parents can have confidence in the school's capacity for sustained self-improvement.

No follow-up inspection is required.

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