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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

St Anthony's Primary School
Larne

Inspected: November 2008

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 SCHOOL CONTEXT

St Anthony's Primary School is situated on the outskirts of Larne. The enrolment has fallen steadily over the last ten years and currently stands at 93. Most of the children travel to school by bus or car as they do not live within the close vicinity of the school; most live within a radius of eight miles. Approximately 24% of the children are entitled to free school meals. The school has identified 16% of the children as requiring additional support with aspects of their learning.

1.2 FOCUS

The inspection focused on the quality of the children's experiences in literacy and numeracy; the use of information and communication technology (ICT) in promoting and supporting learning and teaching and 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 from the Board of Governors (governors) and a group of the children from year 6.

Seventy questionnaires were issued to parents in the primary school; approximately 42% of these were returned to the Department of Education (DE). Sixteen returns contained additional written comments. The majority of the responses indicated a high level of satisfaction with the school. In particular, the parents highlighted the caring and positive ethos, the approachable and dedicated staff, the regular information provided about the life and work of the school and the opportunities for the children to develop their personal and social qualities. A minority of the parents who responded were concerned with regard to the fall in enrolment numbers and would like more guidance on how to support their children with homework.

Five teachers completed the questionnaire and generally commented supportively of the work of the school. A majority of the teachers expressed less satisfaction regarding the provision for children with special educational needs and in the opportunities provided for the children to participate to aspects of the decision making process within the school.

The governors expressed their appreciation of the effective leadership of the Principal, the commitment and dedication of the teachers, the peaceful and calm working atmosphere and the provision for pastoral care in the school.

The group of children which met with members of the team spoke positively about their experiences in school. They talked enthusiastically about the support and care provided by the teachers and assistants and indicated that they feel safe and know whom to turn to in the event of a concern. The views of the parents, the teachers and the children have been shared with the Principal and the governors.

1.4 PASTORAL CARE

The quality of the arrangements for pastoral care in the school is good. Among the strengths are the consultation with the children, for example, in the creation of the school rules, the inclusive and supportive ethos throughout the school, the policy and procedures for addressing bullying issues, and the supportive ethos and the appropriateness of the Positive Behaviour Initiative. The children have opportunities to develop their personal and social skills through a range of extra-curricular activities and links with children from other schools. Appropriate house and merit systems are in place and are highly valued by the children. There is clear evidence of the reward system having a positive impact on the children's motivation, sense of self-esteem and self-confidence. The support staff make a valuable contribution to the life of the school.

The Principal has appropriately identified the benefits of establishing a children's council in order to involve them more in the process of school improvement and support more fully the significant work in establishing a highly positive ethos.

1.5 CHILD PROTECTION

The school has satisfactory arrangements in place for safeguarding children. These arrangements broadly reflect the guidance issued by the relevant Department and it is appropriate that the school has made arrangements for the named designated teacher and the representative from the governors to avail of updated child protection training this term.

1.6 HEALTHY EATING AND PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

The school gives very good attention to promoting healthy eating and physical activity, for example a healthy eating policy, water provision and the promotion of healthy breaks, which encourage the children to adopt healthy lifestyles.

1.7 LINKS WITH PARENTS

The Principal and teachers are committed to developing effective links with parents to ensure they work together for the benefit of the children. The Principal is in his third year in post and has worked conscientiously to ensure that communication with parents is well established and maintained through a regular newsletter, Open Days and information evenings. The parents are welcomed into the school to discuss their children's progress, and increasingly they are being encouraged to take part in educational initiatives to assist them in helping their children. In addition, there is a well established and active Parent Teacher Association (PTA). They meet regularly and through a number of well-organised social, educational and fund-raising events they have made a significant contribution in terms of time, energy and finance to the life and work of the school.

2. ACHIEVEMENTS AND STANDARDS

2.1 LEARNING

The staff create a positive climate for learning; the children readily approach the adults to ask questions and seek support to further their learning. The children settle quickly to their work and display good levels of motivation and engagement in their work. The children regularly work in pairs and groups and interact well with one another.

2.2 ENGLISH AND LITERACY

The children are making satisfactory progress in English; by the end of key stage (KS) 2 most of the children achieve the expected level of attainment in English. The strengths include the children's interest and desire to read in a number of situations, the occasions where they confidently and articulately discuss and relate to the books they are reading at school and at home, and are able to present their findings from a piece of research on their current topic. The children are being introduced to the concept of reflecting on their own work. The school has appropriately carried out a whole-school audit to review the provision in English and literacy and to design a new literacy policy to improve the learning and teaching throughout the school. Detailed action plans have been developed to support teachers in bringing about this improvement. These contain relevant targets including implementing the Revised Curriculum at KS1, incorporating and developing assessment for learning, implementing shared reading throughout the school, and the introduction of a whole-school approach to the teaching of phonics and spelling. They also include the banding of a new commercial reading scheme, and the review and development of the teachers' planning documents.

The children display a confidence and enjoyment in reading. Throughout the foundation stage (FS) and KS1, the majority of the children are able to use a range of reading cues with increasing confidence.

In KS2 the children are developing their reading skills through shared and guided reading, independent reading, and through the developing use of the school library. The new reading scheme is supplemented with a range of fiction and non-fiction books which are all banded to support the children's independent reading. By the end of KS2 the majority of the children read with fluency and understanding. The school has appropriately identified the need to enhance the range and variety of fiction texts.

In the FS the children develop their letter formation and word-building skills through shared writing activities. In KS1 the children are beginning to express their ideas independently and shared reading tasks are suitably linked to writing activities. Individual whiteboards have recently been purchased to promote and support learning and provide more opportunities for the children to write independently. By KS2 the children are writing in a variety of styles and for a range of audiences. It is important that the teachers provide a broader range of more open-ended contexts for writing in order to foster the children's creativity and to provide greater challenge to the more able children. In addition, the children require more focused support to improve their use of basic grammar, spelling and writing conventions. A few children require more specific planning and support for extended and independent writing. The children's writing is celebrated through some displays around the school and in the regular opportunities to read and write poetry.

In the early years, the children are keen to talk about their work. They generally express their thoughts and ideas confidently and clearly. As they progress through KS2 the children's talking and listening continues to be supported through discussion and open-ended questioning. It will be important for the co-ordinator to ensure there is effective and consistent promotion of the children's oral language during the practical activity-based sessions, small group tasks and plenary sessions.

2.3 MATHEMATICS AND NUMERACY

The overall provision for mathematics is satisfactory. While there are strengths in the provision and in the standards the children attain, there are also important areas for improvement. The strengths include the children's competence in learning through practical activities, the links they are able to make between mathematics and real life situations and their ability to explain operations and calculations using appropriate mathematical language. The school has recently identified key targets to meet and has proposed actions to improve learning and teaching in mathematics. They include: the revision of the whole-school policy and programme for mathematics to reflect more fully the requirements of the Northern Ireland Curriculum; the development of a programme for the teaching of mental mathematics, the more effective use of ICT to enhance the children's learning; and the raising of standards in mathematics. The inspection findings endorse these areas for improvement identified by the school.

There is evidence of a changing pattern in the standards the children attain. Over the past four years most of the children, by the end of KS2, achieved standards in mathematics in line with expectations for their age with a significant minority achieving the highest level of attainment. Currently, evidence from the school's own data together with inspection findings indicate considerable variation in standards throughout the school. While a significant minority of the children are very competent in their mathematics and attain good to very good standards, for a majority the attainment needs to be higher. Where the standards attained are good or very good, the children are confident in their understanding of place value, can work flexibly with numbers, understand well the relationship between fractions, percentages and decimals, are competent in estimating and measuring and can apply their understanding and skills to solving problems and carrying out investigations.

The children are able to perform mathematical operations using computers, for example inputting data and creating varieties of graphs, and can use mathematical programs which increase their understanding of certain aspects such as money, number and time. However, the use of ICT to support learning and teaching in mathematics is under-developed.

3. THE QUALITY OF PROVISION FOR LEARNING

3.1 PLANNING

The teachers plan their work consistently and appropriately in the medium- and short-term documents. More recently, the teachers are beginning to involve the children in the planning process. The short-term planning identifies the intended learning outcomes, the resources and the assessment strategies to be used. In some cases, the teachers complete detailed written evaluations of the quality of the children's learning. In the best practice, these evaluations are used to inform future planning and to meet the needs of the children. This good practice needs to be shared more consistently throughout the school.

3.2 TEACHING

All teaching is within a composite class context. During the inspection, the quality of the teaching observed ranged from satisfactory to outstanding, with most of it being good or better. In the most effective practice the lessons were well paced, learning outcomes were clearly identified and shared with the children who were clear on what they were expected to learn. In addition, the planned activities met the needs of all of the children and provided appropriate combinations of practical and problem-solving tasks; the children worked independently, in pairs or groups, and clear links were made to learning in other areas of the curriculum. During these lessons, the teachers used skilful questioning to reinforce and access the children's learning. During the plenary sessions the children had good opportunities to summarise and consolidate key learning points from the lesson. In the less effective practice, the lessons lacked challenge for the more able children or adequate support with appropriate differentiated tasks for those children who require additional help with aspects of their learning. Greater emphasis needs to be given in the early years to promoting independent thinking and learning, for example choosing activities, managing their routines and having greater access to the materials they need.

3.3 ASSESSMENT

The teachers mark the children's work regularly; in the majority of cases the marking of the children's work is positive. Some further development is needed in order to ensure greater consistency throughout the school, in agreeing success criteria with the children and taking more account of marking for improvement. Information on the children's progress is discussed with the parents through regular parent-teacher interviews and communicated through an annual written report.

3.4 SPECIAL/ADDITIONAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS

The school promotes a strong sense of inclusion in which each child is valued. The policy for special educational needs has been reviewed and updated and provision for those children who require additional support with their learning is met primarily through classroom activities.

Classroom teachers provide individual educational plans which set general targets and support strategies for the children, and which are reviewed throughout the year. In the best practice observed, appropriate screening and diagnostic tests are used to diagnose effectively the children's specific learning difficulties or delays.

The school has identified the need to appoint a special educational needs co-ordinator. This is timely, in order to ensure that the roles and responsibilities of teachers, classroom assistants, children and parents are clearly set out and effectively implemented. In developing further the provision, the planned class work needs to be more clearly differentiated to take account of the individual needs and abilities within each class. Standardised test scores need to be monitored and tracked more systematically and consistently in order to provide clear evidence of improvements in learning and teaching.

4. LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

4.1 The Principal combines the roles of teaching and managing the school; he is dedicated and very hard-working with a sound knowledge and understanding of the needs of the school and the wider community. He provides good quality leadership and management of the school and has been instrumental in leading the development of many curricular initiatives. Under his leadership, worthwhile structures are being put in place to monitor and evaluate aspects of the school's provision; for example, the teachers evaluate their work every month, albeit with varying degrees of individual rigour and success, and the children's experiences are monitored, mainly through the teachers' planning and their written evaluations.

4.2 The literacy and numeracy co-ordinators provide good leadership. They each have devised useful action plans, which focus on raising standards. The co-ordinators have made a good start in monitoring and evaluating the quality of learning in literacy and numeracy through examining the children's books and the teachers' planning. It will be important that this good foundation of policy and action planning for improvement led by both co-ordinators is embedded further by the whole-school team.

4.3 PLANNING FOR IMPROVEMENT

The school has devised a well constructed school development plan (SDP). Appropriate policies and actions plans are now in place for example, in teaching and learning, in literacy, child protection, discipline, and anti-bullying which effectively support a culture of review and development for school improvement. There are opportunities for consultation about the SDP within the school community, the parents and the governors. The school now needs to analyse and make more effective use of data and target setting based on the internal school standardised tests and the external DE benchmarking data. The school meets fully the requirements of the School Development Plans Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2005.

5. CONCLUSION

5.1 The strengths of the school include:

- the effective arrangements for pastoral care which promote the children's confidence and self-esteem;
- the good behaviour, motivation and responses of the children;
- the quality of teaching observed which ranged from satisfactory to outstanding, with most of it being good or better;
- the hard-working and committed teachers and the developing sense of team spirit among the staff;
- the effective leadership and management of the Principal; and
- the active contribution of the PTA and the governors to the life and work of the school.

5.2 The areas for improvement include the need to:

- raise further, for a majority of the children, their attainment in literacy and numeracy;
- make more effective provision for the range of abilities within classes; and
- ensure ICT is used more effectively to enhance learning and teaching throughout the school.

5.3 In most of the areas inspected the quality of education provided in this organisation is satisfactory; the strengths outweigh areas for improvement in the provision. The inspection has identified areas for improvement in the standards the children achieve and in learning and teaching which need to be addressed if the needs of all the learners are to be met more effectively.

5.4 It will be important that the employing authority, school governors and the staff plan for, and manage, issues related to the sustainability of the school provision and the school budget, in order to address the current and future needs of the children and the staff.

The Education and Training Inspectorate will monitor and report on the school's progress in addressing the areas for improvement.

ACCOMMODATION

- The steps from the car park to the school are excessively steep and present a health and safety hazard.
- The school does not meet the special educational needs disability order legislation as there is no disabled access.
- The wooden window frames and sills are rotted and crumbling.
- Tiles on the interior window ledges are loose.
- The exterior boundary is crumbling and unsafe.

HEALTH AND SAFETY

- The access road into the school is in a bad state of repair.
- The tiles in the girls' toilets are uneven and badly cracked.
- The perimeter fence is damaged in places.

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