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INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

Education and Training Inspectorate

Report of a Focused Inspection

**St Brigid's Primary School
Mayogall**

Inspected: January 2008

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 St Brigid's Primary School, Mayogall is situated five miles from the town of Maghera, near the village of Gulladuff, County Londonderry. The children come from within a radius of approximately four miles of the surrounding rural area. Over the past three years there has been a steady increase in the enrolment. Approximately 5% of the children are entitled to receive free school meals. The school has identified almost 18% of the children as requiring additional support with aspects of their learning. Five of the eight teaching staff were appointed at the beginning of the current school year.

1.2 The arrangements for the inspection of pastoral care included the completion of questionnaires by the parents and the teachers, as well as meetings with representatives of the Board of Governors (governors) and the children in year 6. One hundred and twenty questionnaires were issued to parents; approximately 58% were returned to the Department of Education (DE) of which 38 contained additional written comments. The parents and the governors commented on the welcoming atmosphere within the school, the good communication between the school and the parents, the good support for those children with additional learning needs, the approachability of the staff, and the hard work and dedication of the Principal and the teaching and support staff within the school. The inspection confirms that these are strengths of the school. The views of the parents and the teachers have been shared with the Principal and the governors.

1.3 The inspection focused on the work in English, the effectiveness of the school's special educational needs provision and pastoral care, including the arrangements for child protection.

2. THE QUALITY OF THE CHILDREN'S LEARNING

2.1 The school provides a bright, warm, family atmosphere with excellent working relationships at all levels. The teaching and support staff work effectively together to assist and encourage the children in their learning and in their personal and social development. The school welcomes children of all abilities and backgrounds, tailoring their provision effectively to their individual needs. The parents and the governors take great pride in the school and support it in many practical ways, for example, through an annual festival which brings the community together.

2.2 The school provides a wide range of sporting, creative and environmental extra-curricular activities. In addition, visitors to the school and school trips enhance the children's education and develop their confidence, self-esteem and knowledge of the world around them. The children have an acute sense of responsibility towards others within the school and are encouraged to develop as citizens, not only in their own community but beyond. Through the school council the children have the opportunity to bring their suggestions directly to the governors through the attendance of a governor at their meetings. This has resulted in several policy changes. The school has very good links with post-primary and primary schools in the area; there is a well-developed and effective link with partner schools to the mutual benefit of the children. The school is highly esteemed within the local community.

2.3 The quality of the arrangements for pastoral care and child protection in the school is excellent. The school has procedures in place which implement fully the guidance outlined in the relevant DE Circulars. The governors, staff, parents and children are fully aware of the school's procedures and have had the opportunity to contribute to a range of effective policies which guide the work of the school. Among the strengths are the creative ways in which the children's views are considered with regard to pastoral matters, the very caring and supportive ethos and the high quality of the pastoral care provided by all of the staff within the school.

2.4 The school gives excellent attention to promoting the health and well-being of the children, including regular opportunities for healthy eating and a good range of physical activities. There are effective policies and programmes in place to develop the children's knowledge of food. The school is recognised as being health-promoting; the active and engaged school council is aware of the importance of promoting a healthy lifestyle and there are regular awards to encourage the children to choose healthy options.

2.5 The detailed and effective six-weekly teaching plans are regularly monitored and adjusted in the light of evaluations by the staff. The planning is coherent and takes into account levels of progression for the various ability ranges within each year group. The teachers plan effectively for individual lessons, identify learning intentions and are developing with the children appropriate success criteria to measure progress. The school recognises the need to, and is working towards, an agreed strategy for using the various forms of assessment to guide the planning and to help the children set appropriate personal targets.

2.6 The quality of the teaching observed was consistently good and in most of the lessons was very good or excellent. The teachers have realistically high expectations of all of the children; they plan well for the different learning styles and give the children good opportunities to take responsibility for their learning. The teachers use a variety of suitable approaches, including the effective use of information and communication technology (ICT), and in particular the interactive whiteboard, to engage the children's interest and to enhance their learning. Many of the lessons observed were well-paced, there was a varied range of materials, and there was a good balance of group, paired and whole-class activities. The good use of effective questioning in the introduction to the lessons stimulated the children's thinking. Effective plenary sessions enabled the children to talk about their learning and to think about improvement.

2.7 Throughout the school the children interact well with one another; they are enthusiastic and excited about their learning and they are motivated to develop their skills further. They respond positively to the teaching and take pride in their work. In all of the classes the children are encouraged to play an integral part in their own learning by listening to the opinions of others, taking on different roles and levels of responsibility, and agreeing success criteria. The children display independence in their learning by working together, thinking of different ways to solve problems and making collective decisions. Many of the children are able to apply their learning in other settings across the curriculum.

2.8 The recently-appointed literacy co-ordinator has started to audit and monitor the current provision with the staff in order to reach agreement on priorities for the planning for literacy within the school. There is an action plan with a clear focus on the improvement of the children's standards in English. The standards in literacy have been improving year on year and are good. The school is particularly successful in supporting those children with additional needs and adding value to their attainment in English.

2.9 From year 1, the children develop their talking and listening skills in class through a range of suitable activities and through the skilful use of questioning by the teachers to extend their responses, to clarify meaning and to develop their thinking. They have good opportunities to talk and perform in class and in assemblies, in class discussions including debates and drama, and through the well-developed use of Circle Time and Personal Development and Mutual Understanding sessions. In many of the lessons observed the children worked together to prepare responses, to prioritise answers and to make decisions about a range of well-prepared topics. Some of the children have had notable personal successes in national competitions and all of the children are actively encouraged and supported in the development of their oral skills across the curriculum.

2.10 The love of reading is promoted throughout the school through the regular use of the refurbished library, a new reading scheme and a selection of novels to guide and support the work in the key stage (KS) 2 classes. The school makes good use of shared, guided and paired reading to promote improvement in the children's reading; in particular the work across the key stages, in which the older children support and encourage the younger children, is mutually beneficial. In the foundation stage, the teachers use a phonics programme effectively to develop the children's word recognition skills, to engage them in exploring words and in using text. Across the curriculum there are examples of the appropriate use of a range of written texts to develop the children's research skills and to enhance the contexts and purposes for reading and for information. By the end of KS2 the children read with good fluency, accuracy and expression.

2.11 The teachers provide good opportunities for the development of emergent writing as part of the activity-based learning. As the children progress through the school they develop their independent writing well; they write in a range of styles and for a variety of audiences. There is good planning for comprehension and the development of creative writing linked to the texts used by the classes. The teachers provide a thoughtful range of stimuli to motivate the children's thinking and to support their creativity. The children's creative writing has featured in a range of local and national publications. Many of the materials used to stimulate the children's thinking support the school's focus on inclusivity and on international citizenship, providing good opportunities to empathise with those from other cultures. The opportunities to write independently need to be extended more consistently across the curriculum.

2.12 The teachers mark the children's work regularly. They have been developing their marking to support the children better and to lead them towards improvement. In the best practice, there are supportive comments and a clear indication of what the child needs to do to improve the work. This practice needs to be disseminated more consistently across the school.

2.13 The special educational needs co-ordinator (SENCO) provides effective support and focuses on early identification and intervention strategies. The school uses appropriate diagnostic testing, together with the teachers' observations to readily identify the children's specific learning difficulties. The current provision is mainly through in-class support, with a few of the children receiving withdrawal support. Specific peripatetic support for children with particular needs is provided by the North-Eastern Education and Library Board. The support staff provide sensitive, valuable and well-directed support and contribute significantly to the children's all-round learning and development. The SENCO liaises with class teachers to prepare education plans for each child; these are reviewed on a regular basis and the progress is reported to the parents. The children respond positively and learn in a very supportive environment. They grow in confidence and integrate well in classroom activities and during opportunities to participate in school shows and performances.

2.14 The well-informed and inspirational Principal provides outstanding leadership and a clear vision for the school. She fosters a good team spirit and a collegial approach to the work of the school. She values the children and the contribution of both the teaching and the support staff, and is well respected within the local community. The school benefits from her professional expertise and her involvement with other groupings in the wider community. She is well-supported by her management team and those who have taken on responsibility for particular curriculum areas.

2.15 Staff development is a key focus within the school and is appropriately linked to the needs of the children, the staff and the school development plan (SDP), ensuring that opportunities are available for all staff to benefit from a range of training. The improvement process is clearly linked to the SDP, which has taken account of the views of a range of stakeholders within the school community. Policies and programmes are in place which effectively support a culture of school self-evaluation and improvement. The school meets fully the requirements of the School Development Plans Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2005.

2.16 The accommodation is used effectively and maintained to a high standard. The caretaking is of the highest quality and the school has benefited from voluntary help from the community. While the majority of the classrooms are of a satisfactory size, there are problems when circulating about the school due to steps, and narrow entrances and corridors. There are also health and safety issues, detailed in the appendix, with regard to evacuation in the event of a fire. To comply with the Special Educational Needs and Disability Act legislation, the school has indicated that the already restricted storage facilities will need to be reduced further. During the inspection one of the classes was accommodated in a mobile classroom which is to be replaced.

3. CONCLUSION

3.1 The strengths of the school include:

- the caring and inclusive ethos of the school, reflected through the strong collegial approach of the teaching and support staff in supporting the children in their learning and in their personal and social development;
- the high levels of engagement and motivation displayed by the children;

- the effectiveness of the teaching in English which was very good or excellent, in most of the lessons observed;
- the well-developed and effective use of ICT to enhance and support the children's learning;
- the high quality of the support for those children with additional learning needs, which are being well met, in an encouraging environment through the effective use of a range of support staff; and
- the effective leadership and management of the Principal who has a clear vision for the development of the school as part of the wider community.

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

No follow-up inspection is required.

HEALTH AND SAFETY

- Due to the narrow access to some of the rooms, the methods of evacuation in the event of an emergency are restricted and may constitute a safety hazard.

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