



*The Education and Training Inspectorate -
Promoting Improvement*



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 Columba's Primary School
Derry**

Inspected: February 2009

CONTENTS

Section		Page
	STATISTICAL INFORMATION	
1.	INTRODUCTION	1
2.	ACHIEVEMENTS AND STANDARDS	2
3.	THE QUALITY OF PROVISION FOR LEARNING	4
4.	LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT	5
5.	CONCLUSION	6
	APPENDIX	

BASIC INFORMATION SHEET (BIS) - PRIMARY SCHOOLS

- A. i. **School: St Columba's Primary School Derry** iii. **Date of Inspection: W/B 02.02.2009**
 ii. **School Reference Number: 203-6247** iv. **Nature of Inspection: Focused**

B.

School Year	2004/05	2005/06	2006/07	2007/08	2008/09
Year 1 Intake	8	7	11	4	5
Enrolments					
Primary	84	69	65	56	50
Reception	1	5	2	2	0
Nursery Class/Classes	-	-	-	-	-
Special Unit	-	-	-	-	-

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.

The calculations at C and D should be based on the total of the primary and reception enrolments only.

- C. Average Attendance for the Previous School Year
 (expressed as a percentage):

95.7%

Primary & Reception	Nursery Unit	Special Unit
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- D. i. Number of Teachers
 (including the principal and part-time teachers):
 (Full-time equivalent = 25 teaching hours)

3

-

-

- ii. PTR (Pupil/Teacher Ratio):

16.6%

NI PTR: 20.8

- iii. Average Class Size:

7.1%

- iv. Class Size (Range):

4 to 11

- v. Ancillary Support:

Number of Hours **Per Week**:

- i. Clerical support:

20

- ii. Official Making A Good
 Start Support:

10

- iii. Additional hours of other
 classroom assistant support:

17½

- vi. Percentage of children with statements of special educational needs:

2%

- vii. Total percentage of children on the Special Needs Register:

16%

- viii. Number of children who are not of statutory school age:

0

- ix. Number of families in school:

35

- x. Percentage of children entitled to free school meals:

2%

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 SCHOOL CONTEXT

St Columba's Primary School is situated on the Duncastle Road in the village of Newbuildings, Co Londonderry. Almost all of the children travel to school by bus or car from within a radius of approximately four miles. The enrolment has been declining steadily in recent years and presently stands at 50 children. Approximately 2% of the children are entitled to free school meals. Sixteen per cent of the children have been identified as requiring additional support with aspects of their learning.

1.2 FOCUS

The inspection focused on the quality of the work in English/literacy and mathematics/numeracy, including the contribution of information and communication technology (ICT) in promoting and supporting the learning in these two areas. The school's arrangements for pastoral care, including child protection, and healthy eating and physical activity 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 confidential questionnaires prior to the inspection, as well as meetings with representatives from the Board of Governors (governors) and the children from year 6. Thirty five questionnaires were issued to the parents; 60% of these were returned to the Department of Education (DE) and nine contained written comments.

The responses indicate a very high level of satisfaction with all aspects of the life and work of the school. In their written comments the parents praised the hard work of the staff and the educational and pastoral provision for the children.

All of the teaching staff completed the online questionnaire. Their responses were highly affirmative of the work of the school.

The governors expressed their appreciation of the work of all the staff. They indicated that they were very content with the educational and pastoral provision in the school and the standards attained by the children. They reported that they were kept well-informed of the school development planning process and all other aspects of school life.

The children talked with enthusiasm about the many aspects of school life and, from the discussions, it is clear that they are aware of what to do if they have any concerns about their learning and care.

An analysis of the questionnaires and the written comments made by the parents and the teachers were shared with the Principal and the governors.

1.4 PASTORAL CARE

The quality of the provision for pastoral care in the school is very good. Among the strengths are the exemplary behaviour of the children, the positive working relationships at all levels which foster an inclusive and caring ethos throughout the school and within the local community, and the range and quality of the pastoral care policies which have been recently reviewed. Achievement incentives are awarded regularly to encourage the development of the children's self-esteem and self-confidence. The recent introduction of a class council, as identified within the School Development Plan (SDP) provides further opportunity for the children to become more actively involved in the decision-making process and to be supportive of their peers.

1.5 CHILD PROTECTION

The school has very good comprehensive arrangements in place for safeguarding children. These arrangements reflect the guidance issued by the DE.

1.6 HEALTHY EATING AND PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

The school gives outstanding attention to promoting healthy eating and physical activity, for example, there are effective policies in place which guide and support whole-school healthy eating programmes and fruit tasting opportunities. Such well-embedded practices encourage the children to adopt healthy lifestyles.

2. ACHIEVEMENTS AND STANDARDS

2.1 LEARNING

The children are well motivated and show positive attitudes to their learning. They undertake the tasks they are set with enthusiasm and show high levels of perseverance in completing them. They co-operate well on shared tasks. Most of the children are acquiring skills in a progressive manner and are able to apply these in a variety of contexts. During the inspection, there was evidence that the children are developing strategies to aid their thinking skills and personal capabilities as a consequence of developments in the curriculum.

2.2 ENGLISH AND LITERACY

The children are making good progress in English; by the end of key stage (KS) 2 most achieve the expected level of attainment for their age in English. The literacy co-ordinator provides effective strategic leadership and has a clear vision for the development of this aspect of the school's work.

During the inspection, oral work of a very good quality was observed. In the best practice, the teachers employed a wide range of well-planned and imaginative strategies, and they frequently encouraged the children to pose, as well as to answer focused questions. The children are able to express their opinions and to share their views with others. For example, in a year 6 and 7 composite class discussion focusing on the key factors associated with new house building and the possible impact upon the local environment, the children listened attentively, displayed very good oral skills and contributed to the debate and discussion with perception and interest.

In the foundation stage (FS) and KS1, the children are acquiring basic reading skills through the development of phonological awareness and experience of shared and modelled reading. By the end of KS1, the majority of the children read with increasing confidence and enjoyment. Activities using the interactive whiteboard are used effectively to motivate and engage the children in challenging word recognition tasks. In KS2, the children develop their reading skills further through shared and guided reading, independent reading, and through making good use of the school library. The children are able to talk enthusiastically about reading preferences, and most demonstrate positive reading habits. By the end of KS2, most of the children read with fluency and understanding at a level equal to or greater than their age.

A good start has been made to developing the children's writing skills through work in other areas of the curriculum. During the inspection the children were provided with opportunities to write for a variety of purposes, for example, within the local and relevant context of Prehen Woods. In the FS and in KS1 the children develop their letter formation and word-building skills through shared writing activities. By KS2 the children are able to write in a variety of styles and for a range of audiences. In taking forward this developmental work the over-emphasis on grammatical exercises in KS2 requires review and more specific planning and support in extended writing activities is required for a small number of children in both key stages.

The current action plan for literacy identifies, as a priority, the need to develop a range of strategies to improve the quality of the children's writing experiences. The teachers' planning has been reviewed recently and includes appropriate ICT references to support writing activities which are matched well to the children's ability and related to their ongoing class work. It is appropriate that the school is beginning to plan approaches to the ongoing systematic assessment and recording of individual children's progress and attainment in ICT.

2.3 MATHEMATICS AND NUMERACY

The provision for mathematics is good. The children learn through a variety of rich and practical experiences. In the FS and KS1, the children are able to work collectively and individually, making use of well-planned resources to undertake tasks which develop their understanding. For example, the youngest children are using real coins in play and recorded tasks to buy and sell goods and to solve simple problems of exchange. The children in KS1 are developing a sound understanding of number and fractions through the use of fraction boards in carefully planned activities.

A key strength of the provision in mathematics is the quality of oral work and discussion. The teachers use questioning very effectively to challenge the children's thinking and to extend their understanding. The children are able to engage in meaningful group work where they learn through questioning one another and presenting opinions. An example of such an approach was observed with the children in KS2, where they were able to discuss and agree the likely outcome of random events in a study of probability.

Most of the children make steady progress in their mathematics and for the majority, it is good or very good. In each year group, most attain standards in mathematics which are average or better. There is a small number of children whose attainment is below that when compared with their measured ability. The school is aware of this issue and it will be

important that it is addressed. By the end of KS2, the children show a good understanding of place value, the relationship between fractions, decimals and percentages and metric measurement. They are able to undertake investigations and surveys, and to illustrate their findings graphically. Key strengths of the work include the setting of tasks for the children in contexts which reflect the use of mathematics in the real world and the local community, and the opportunities provided for the children to write about their mathematics which is helping to reinforce their learning.

The school is very well-resourced with computers and other ICT equipment; a computer suite has also been established. In the lessons observed ICT was used effectively to support learning in literacy and numeracy. The school recognises that ICT continues to be an area for continuing development and has sound action plans to address this need. A good example of the recent developments is the level 4 and 5 attainments gained by the year 7 children in the Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (CCEA) ICT Accreditation Scheme.

3. THE QUALITY OF PROVISION FOR LEARNING

3.1 PLANNING

The teachers undertake their short-term planning conscientiously. They focus it, appropriately, on the intended learning outcomes for the children and, on most occasions, ensure there is adequate differentiation to provide for the different year groups and different abilities within each of the three classes. Planning at whole-school level for aspects of the curriculum is an area for development which the school recognises and is addressing in a systematic manner. There is evidence of effective and regular evaluation of the children's learning being carried out; this process needs to be undertaken more consistently throughout the school.

3.2 TEACHING

The teachers are hard-working and highly committed to the education and welfare of the children. The quality of the teaching in most of the lessons observed was very good and, in a small number, it was excellent. In the best teaching, the intended learning outcomes were shared with the children, the activities were differentiated to cater for all ability levels, there was very effective interaction between the teacher and the children throughout the lesson and, through the plenary session, it was evident that the children's learning had been developed.

3.3 ASSESSMENT

The teachers mark the children's work regularly often annotating it with encouraging comments. They now need to develop their assessment processes to include marking which indicates to the children how their work can be improved. Assessment at year group and whole-school levels is supplemented by information gained from standardised testing. The analysis and effective use of this data is at an early stage of development in the school and is already proving helpful in informing learning and teaching. It needs to be developed further.

3.4 ADDITIONAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS

The arrangements for special educational needs (SEN), under the competent leadership of the special educational needs co-ordinator (SENCO), are systematic and effective. The class teachers liaise with the SENCO to develop individual education plans (IEPs) which set out targets and strategies to address each child's needs. These targets are reviewed regularly and shared with the parents. The teachers show a strong commitment to meeting the needs of the children in a sensitive and supportive manner, providing suitably differentiated activities which take account of the range of abilities within the class. The school deploys and utilises well the excellent support provided by the classroom assistants. Good links are maintained with various external support agencies and these provide valuable assistance to individual children. There is evidence to show that actions taken have resulted in improvements in the children's learning.

4. LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

4.1 LEADERSHIP

The Principal is in her second year in post. She combines the dual role of leading and managing the school together with class teaching very effectively. In her relatively short time in post she has led the development of many key aspects of life and work in the school. Presently, she has lead responsibility for too many aspects of management and the school's governors should review the current distribution of duties at management level.

The Principal receives good support from the teaching and non-teaching staff in the school. The Vice-principal and the other teacher have each given long-standing service to the children in St Columba's Primary School. Each has responsibility for co-ordinating areas of the curriculum and undertake their roles conscientiously. They have developed their monitoring roles to include evaluation of planning and the scrutiny of the children's books. The practice of making class visits should now be considered by the co-ordinators as a means of informing them more fully about the quality of learning and teaching in mathematics and literacy throughout the whole-school.

4.2 PLANNING FOR IMPROVEMENT

The SDP is well devised and sets out clearly the current context and the proposed actions to effect improvement in key areas. In particular, the action plans for literacy and numeracy set appropriate targets for raising further the children's achievements and attainments.

The school's processes for effective self-evaluation are at a developmental stage. It will be important that the good work in this area begun in recent years is embedded further to ensure it informs all aspects of the school's development and improvement programme.

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 school budget, in order to address the current and future needs of the children and the staff.

5. CONCLUSION

The strengths of the school include:

- the inclusive and caring ethos;
- the quality of the arrangements for pastoral care, including child protection;
- the quality of the teaching observed, which in most lessons was very good and, in a small number, excellent;
- the provision made for children with additional educational needs;
- the standards achieved by most of the children in literacy and numeracy; and
- the effective leadership of the Principal.

The areas for improvement include:

- the need to develop further the assessment for learning strategies, in particular, marking for improvement; and
- the need to develop further the effective use of performance data to help inform improvements in learning and teaching.

In the areas inspected, the quality of education provided by the school is good. The school has important strengths in most of its educational and pastoral provision. The inspection has identified areas for improvement which the school has demonstrated the capacity to address.

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

APPENDIX

ACCOMMODATION

1. The school's heating system is inadequate with the result that most of the classrooms are not sufficiently warm during times of cold weather.

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