



*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
Straw, Draperstown**

Inspected: May 2008

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BASIC INFORMATION SHEET (BIS) - PRIMARY SCHOOLS

- A. i. **School:** St Columba's Primary
Straw, Draperstown
- iii. **Date of Inspection:** W/B 12.05.08
- ii. **School Reference Number:** 303-2268
- iv. **Nature of Inspection:** FI/Ma/ICT

B.

School Year	2003/04	2004/05	2005/06	2006/07	2007/08
Year 1 Intake	12	14	19	18	26
Enrolments					
Primary	100	102	112	118	128
Reception	3	3	4	4	5
Nursery Class/Classes	0	0	0	0	0
Special Unit	0	0	0	0	0

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):

97%

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)

6	0	0
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- ii. PTR (Pupil/Teacher Ratio): 22.2 NI PTR: 20.8

- iii. Average Class Size: 22

- iv. Class Size (Range): 12 to 29

- v. Ancillary Support:
Number of Hours **Per Week**:

- | | |
|--|----|
| i. Clerical support: | 5 |
| ii. Official Making A Good
Start Support: | 10 |
| iii. Additional hours of other
classroom assistant support: | 45 |

- vi. Percentage of children with statements of special educational needs: 1.5%

- vii. Total percentage of children on the Special Needs Register: 14%

- viii. Number of children who are **not** of statutory school age: 5

- ix. Percentage of children entitled to free school meals: 4%

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 St Columba's Primary School, Straw is situated near Draperstown, County Londonderry. The children come from within a three mile radius of the surrounding rural area. Over the past three years there has been a steady increase in the enrolment which is currently 128. At the time of the inspection 4% of the children were entitled to receive free school meals.

1.2 The arrangements for the inspection of pastoral care and child protection included the opportunity for the parents and teachers to complete a confidential questionnaire prior to the inspection, as well as meetings with representatives from the Board of Governors (governors) and groups of children from years 6 and 7. Eighty-nine questionnaires were issued to parents; approximately 60% were returned to the Department of Education (DE) of which 27 contained additional written comments. The responses from the parental questionnaires strongly support the work of the school, in particular the dedicated and caring staff, the wide range of opportunities available for the children and the high regard in which the school is held by the local community. All of the teachers completed the questionnaire and spoke highly of the working relationships across the school and the holistic approach to the children's development. The governors expressed their confidence in the school and in the leadership of the Principal. The issue of accommodation was raised by all groups as a concern due to the lack of sufficient teaching space. The children in year 6 spoke very positively about their enjoyment of school including the wide variety of methods by which they learn. They reported that they feel safe, and know whom to turn to in the event of a concern. The Education and Training Inspectorate has reported to the Principal and representatives of the governors the main messages emerging from the questionnaires and the discussions.

1.3 The inspection focused on the quality of the work in mathematics, including the use of information and communication technology (ICT) in supporting numeracy, and the effectiveness of the school's special educational needs provision. The inspection also evaluated the school's procedures in relation to pastoral care, including child protection.

2. QUALITY OF THE CHILDREN'S WORK

2.1 The children learn in a bright, stimulating and caring environment where their work and achievements are celebrated throughout the school. This positive learning atmosphere supports the development of the children as confident, courteous and enthusiastic learners. The working relationships throughout the school display mutual respect and there is a clear sense of inclusion. Positive behaviour is encouraged through the involvement of all of the children in formulating the school routines and consequences, and these are well-established. There is an atmosphere of fun and enjoyable learning shared by all. The teaching and support staff work closely as a team and the non-teaching staff make a valuable contribution to the work of the school.

2.2 There is a wide range of opportunities, including sports and school trips to support and enhance the personal development of the children. The school has strong links with the local community and neighbouring primary and post-primary schools. The school has displayed strong commitment to communicating with parents on both curriculum and pastoral issues.

2.3 The quality of the arrangements for pastoral care and child protection in the school is very good. The school has procedures in place which implement fully the guidance outlined in the relevant Department of Education 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 the routines within the school, 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 health and well-being, including opportunities for healthy eating and physical activity. There are effective policies and programmes in place, for example, promotion and provision of healthy breaks and water, growing and cooking vegetables and 'energiser' breaks, which encourage the children to adopt healthy lifestyles.

2.5 The quality of the teaching observed was always very good with the majority of lessons being excellent. In the best practice there was good pace, clear differentiation, the learning intentions were shared at the opening, the children devised their own success criteria and these were revisited during the plenary discussion. Excellent use was made of questioning to develop the children's oracy and to encourage their thinking skills, and the children were encouraged to develop their own questions. There were opportunities for independent learning, problem-solving and peer evaluation. Within the foundation stage (FS) the activities are based on topics that are stimulating and related to real life situations.

2.6 The school gives a high priority to the development of mathematics and over the last two years has invested heavily in the development of a very useful and detailed whole-school scheme of work. Currently the development of mathematics is on the school development plan (SDP) and the school is in cohort 2 of the Northern Ireland Numeracy Strategy. The teachers appreciate the support and guidance provided by the North-Eastern Education and Library Board (NEELB) Curriculum Advisory and Support Service in the development of the scheme. The teachers are currently focusing on the integration of ICT to support further the learning and teaching in mathematics.

2.7 All of the teachers plan their work effectively in the medium- and short-term. The teachers' planning focuses on the learning outcomes, the learning activities, the related mathematical language and clearly identifies how they intend to meet the range of needs within their class. In all the lessons observed, the children displayed enthusiasm and enjoyment and were motivated by the creative practical activities. They engaged co-operatively in group and paired work and talked confidently about their learning. The teaching is of a high standard and good opportunities are provided for mental, practical and investigative mathematics. Much of the good practice observed in lessons made useful links to other areas of the curriculum and placed appropriate emphasis on problem-solving and the consolidation of learning. Mathematics work is presented well and marked supportively highlighting the children's strengths and areas for development. As part of a useful self-evaluative process, and to ensure progression, the teachers, together with the co-ordinator, examine carefully the children's work and identify areas for whole-school development in mathematics.

2.8 A strong emphasis is placed on practical and active lessons integrating very effectively, at the FS, learning in mathematics and physical development. At key stage (KS) 1, the teachers provide opportunities for the children to develop early mathematical concepts, skills and language through a combination of well-planned, play-based activities and practical mathematics. Effective use is made of ICT to consolidate learning and good opportunities are provided for developing mathematical language.

2.9 At KS2, the children have a good range of experiences across all areas of mathematics often linked effectively to topic areas. Almost all the older children persevere and show a developing ability to work together systematically and supportively when presented with an investigation. They are provided with good opportunities to work independently and to make choices, for example when collecting and presenting data. By the end of year 7, most of the children are achieving appropriate standards and are developing good mathematical thinking. It is appropriate that the teachers continue to provide additional opportunities for the more able children to apply their mathematical skills and concepts in more unfamiliar and challenging situations.

2.10 A useful action plan guides the development of ICT across the school. The teachers have developed their planning to highlight more effectively the integration of ICT to support the learning and teaching of mathematics, and are evaluating the progression sheets for data handling and problem-solving. The children record the programs used and periodically self-assess their own learning while the teachers monitor and record the competences, the programs used and the learning outcomes for individual children. There is plentiful evidence of ICT skills being used by the children. At KS1, ICT is used well to assist with the development of motor skills and to support early learning in mathematics. Good use is made of programmable devices, to assist their understanding of direction and of giving instructions and the teachers make very effective use of digital photography to record and enhance the children's learning experiences. By the end of KS2, the children are very competent in using a wide range of programs to gather and present information.

2.11 The children's written work is marked regularly and supportively; marking for improvement is good across the school. The teacher's comments relate to the learning outcomes and the children are advised how to improve the standard of their work. The children are also often given opportunities to assess their own and each other's work. Monitoring and recording of the children's progress, particularly at the FS, is extensive and detailed; internal records of progress for individual children are also very detailed and used effectively to inform the teachers' planning as the children progress through the school. The school uses standardised testing well to identify the children's needs and to assess their level of achievement and progress in mathematics. There are clear processes in place to inform parents of their child's progress in all the areas of learning.

2.12 The school has identified 14% of the children as requiring additional support with aspects of their learning. The special educational needs co-ordinator makes good use of diagnostic tests for early and accurate identification of the children's needs. The development of individual education plans (IEPs) is carried out in conjunction with the class teacher and is clearly communicated with parents. The IEPs give clear and measurable

targets, the individual child's progress is monitored regularly and detailed evaluations inform future planning. There is excellent communication between the class teacher and the support teachers ensuring that the work covered during withdrawal is matched to and supports well the learning in class. The children also benefit from support through the NEELB.

2.13 The highly dedicated Principal provides excellent leadership, fostering a good team-spirit and collegial approach to the work of the school. She values the children and the contribution of the teaching and support staff and is respected within the local community. She is supported well by her Vice-principal and staff.

2.14 There is a developing culture of self-evaluation among the staff. Staff development is appropriately linked to the needs of the children, staff and the SDP and the outcomes of staff training are reflected in the learning and teaching. There is a need to bring together all relevant necessary documentation, which is held in other places, in order to meet fully the requirements of the School Development Plans Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2005.

2.15 The accommodation is clean and maintained well and effective use is made of the very limited space, such as the development of a number of outdoor areas to support learning and teaching.

3. CONCLUSION

3.1 The strengths of the school include:

- the enthusiastic and highly motivated children who display enjoyment in their learning;
- the strong sense of community which includes the excellent working relationships at all levels;
- the quality of the teaching which is always very good with the majority of lessons being excellent;
- the creative approaches to learning and teaching;
- the quality of provision for numeracy and ICT; and
- the leadership and dedication of the Principal.

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

- The need to review the access arrangements to the school.
- The need to ensure there is clear visual access to all classrooms.

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