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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 Francis Primary School and Nursery Unit  
Lurgan**

**Inspected: November 2006**

## CONTENTS

<b>Section</b>		<b>Page</b>
	STATISTICAL INFORMATION	
1.	INTRODUCTION	1
2.	THE QUALITY OF THE CHILDREN'S WORK	2
3.	CONCLUSION	6
4.	THE NURSERY UNIT	8
	STATISTICAL INFORMATION (NURSERY UNIT)	



## 1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 St Francis' Primary School is situated on a spacious site in Francis Street, Lurgan. The school was established in 2001 from the amalgamation of three schools, namely, St Joseph's Infant School, St Peter's Boys' Primary School and Sacred Heart Girls' Primary School. In addition to a nursery unit, the school also has an Irish-medium unit. The school's enrolment has continued an upward trend in recent years and presently stands at 749. Almost all of the children come from the surrounding area. Approximately 21% of the children are entitled to free school meals.

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 as well as meetings with representatives from the Board of Governors (BoG), a group of the children from year 6 and a meeting with the school council. Of the 151 questionnaires issued to the parents, 44% were returned to the Department of Education (DE) and 35 contained additional written comments. The responses from the parental questionnaires indicated that the parents were very satisfied with almost all aspects of the work of the school; in their written comments they praised the commitment of the staff to the children, the good working relationships within the school and the wide range of extra-curricular activities provided for the children. A small number of the parents raised concerns in their responses relating to the promotion of reading within the school and the degree of challenge for the more able children. The BoG expressed their appreciation of the quality of education and care provided for the children in the school.

1.3 In discussions held with the children, they talked enthusiastically about the encouragement from the teachers and the wide range of extra-curricular activities available to them. They indicated that they are aware of what to do if they have any worries about their safety and wellbeing.

1.4 The Education and Training Inspectorate (Inspectorate) has reported to the Principal and a representative of the BoG the main issues emerging from the questionnaires and the discussions. The issues raised are dealt with in the main body of the report in paragraphs 2.6 and 2.14.

1.5 There are many strengths in the quality of the arrangements for pastoral care and child protection. The school has procedures in place which implement the guidance outlined in the relevant DE circulars and has identified appropriately a few minor areas for improvement which it is currently implementing. Among the strengths are the caring ethos throughout the school, the celebration of the children's achievements and the active school council. The few minor areas for improvement identified already within the school's development plan (SDP) include:

- a review of the anti-bullying policy including consultation with the staff, the children and the parents; and
- a review and update of the child protection training for staff.

1.6 The inspection focused on the quality of work in English and the effectiveness of the school's special educational needs provision. In addition, the report makes reference to the contribution of information and communication technology (ICT) in promoting and supporting learning and teaching in English.

## **2. THE QUALITY OF THE CHILDREN'S WORK**

2.1 The school learning environment is stimulating with numerous examples of the children's work displayed in an attractive manner. The children's achievements and experiences are celebrated through various reward schemes and pictorial records. Working relationships between the staff and the children are excellent. The children are most respectful to the staff, they are courteous and their behaviour is consistently good. There is a clear sense of inclusion reflected in the school's approach to the children from a variety of other countries and to the children with particular special educational needs; the school meets the requirements of the Special Educational Needs Disability Order (SENDO).

2.2 The school is held in high esteem within the local community and enjoys strong support from the BoG and the parents. The parents are involved at the earliest stage of their children's schooling and provided with regular guidance and information on the work of the school. The teachers provide workshops for the parents and include them in helpful initiatives such as paired reading. The parents are kept well-informed through regular newsletters and have frequent opportunities to discuss their children's progress with the teachers.

2.3 The school's programme for the promotion of health and well-being has many sound features. Attention is given to the development and implementation of programmes which encourage the children to adopt healthy life-styles. There is a developing commitment to promoting healthy eating, and opportunities are provided for the children to participate in a range of physical activities.

2.4 The children's learning and personal development are enhanced through their participation in a wide variety of extra-curricular activities, including sports, music, dance, crafts, public speaking and current affairs. The children also benefit from the opportunities to link with another school through Education for Mutual Understanding (EMU) in an arts based project.

2.5 The teachers undertake their short-term planning conscientiously and, in the best practice observed, focus it on the intended learning outcomes for the children. They are developing their practice of sharing learning objectives with the children at the outset of lessons and revisiting them at intervals and again at the conclusion during plenary sessions. While the planning often makes provision for different tasks based on the children's differing abilities, it requires also to be more sharply focused on the children's needs. The teachers meet together regularly in year groups to plan and review; the reviews need, however, to reflect more directly on the extent of the children's learning.

2.6 The teachers are hard-working and committed to the education and welfare of the children. The quality of teaching observed ranges from excellent to satisfactory; it is good or better in most instances. In the best practice, the teachers use a variety of teaching approaches, match the tasks well to the children's needs and abilities, and use oral language well, including skilful questioning, to promote the children's understanding. When it is less effective, the teachers' expectations for what the children are capable of achieving are too low, resulting in work set which does not challenge the children adequately or develop their learning sufficiently.

2.7 In general, the children are well-motivated, have a positive attitude to their learning and show good levels of perseverance in completing tasks. They have opportunities to work in a variety of ways and interact well with others. The children make progress in their learning but for too many of them, however, the standards they achieve are lower than would be expected for children of their age. They need to be provided with additional opportunities to develop their thinking skills and their understanding more effectively to ensure their learning is promoted in a sustained, progressive and coherent manner.

2.8 The teachers mark the children's work regularly recognising, through annotated comments, the efforts made. In the best practice seen, the marking identifies for the children how their work could be further improved.

2.9 The school is committed to the ongoing development of play throughout key stage (KS) 1. There has been a particular focus on planning and the provision for outdoor play. With the assistance of curriculum officers from the Southern Education and Library Board (SELB), the teachers are continuing to develop the programme for play-based learning within the context of proposals for the revised Northern Ireland curriculum. They plan carefully for play and provide a wide variety of activities to reinforce and extend the children's learning across the curriculum. Good use is made of all the space to create appropriate areas for play and encourage the children to exercise choice in the activities they undertake. The teachers and classroom assistants interact effectively with the children and encourage them to extend and develop their language and ideas. The teachers have established clear routines and the children work with purpose and enjoyment. At the end of the sessions the children are given the opportunity to talk about their learning and share their experiences with others. It will be important for the teachers to monitor further the developments in play, in particular, how they contribute to the progression in the children's learning.

2.10 The school is redrafting the special needs policy to develop further guidance in providing for the children with special educational needs. The administrative requirements of the Code of Practice are efficiently met. The individual education plans for children identified as having special educational needs are of a good quality and include targets which are focused appropriately on the specific learning outcomes expected. The quality of the teaching and the leadership of the special educational needs co-ordinators (SENCO) are very good. In all of the reading lessons observed in withdrawal sessions, the teachers used a well-organised variety of methods to develop the children's independent reading skills, and there was evidence that the children benefited from this intensive support. There are detailed and appropriate records of the progress being made by individual children and of the work they complete. Liaison between the SENCOs, the class teachers and the classroom assistants is well planned and effective. The SENCOs, with the valuable support of the vice-principal who has responsibility for assessment throughout the school, employs a wide range of standardised tests to identify those children who enter the special needs programme. The

SENCOs' thorough planning is reflected in the high quality of her work. The special needs register identifies a significant minority of the children in the school who need additional support. To meet the needs of these children more effectively the school needs to place a much sharper focus on identifying and implementing specific support strategies in the mainstream classes, particularly for the teaching of reading, in order to reduce the number of children requiring help in basic literacy skills.

2.11 The teachers' planning for English is undertaken conscientiously; while the intended learning outcomes are often identified and learning tasks are differentiated, it provides insufficient guidance about teaching approaches to be used. The planning for the three attainment targets is not integrated sufficiently with the result the tasks set are often isolated and skills are not transferred, developed and applied through other areas of the curriculum.

2.12 The opportunities afforded to the children in talking and listening, reading and writing are not consistent within and across year groups. In the best practice observed, the children have opportunities to work in pairs and groups to discuss matters, for example, relating to a novel or topic work. They present the findings to the whole class and on some occasions answer questions based on what they have reported. Good use is made of PowerPoint presentations when reporting back to the class. The children incorporate effective slide transitions and animated graphics to make dramatic and humorous effects to complement their oral presentation. On other occasions the children have few opportunities to develop progressively the skills associated with the expression of opinions, views and feelings.

2.13 In their writing some of the children produce work of a good standard. The younger children record their thoughts and comments on various activities in which they have participated. The older children write stories for the younger classes and have increasing opportunities to write independently. Good use is made of word-processing software to enable the children to compose and edit their work on-screen. The older children are able to use appropriately selected items from the Learning Northern Ireland (LNI) content from Learn Premium to support the class work in vocabulary. The resource is matched well to the classwork and the children are able to use it effectively. The children work in buddy pairs, with one child guiding another. Too often, however, there is an over-emphasis placed on handwriting practice and the completion of isolated text book exercises. There needs to be greater consistency in developing the children's skills as writers as they progress within each key stage and regular opportunities to apply and develop further their writing competence through other areas of the curriculum.

2.14 The school has rightly identified reading as an issue for development this year and has added a systematic approach to the teaching of reading through the use of Jolly Phonics. The teachers report that this has helped them focus more clearly on equipping the children with the skills to read and help them identify new words. The teachers make good use of computer games and websites to promote and consolidate the use of phonics to support the children's reading. Some of the children have good opportunities to develop their research skills to support their work in class; one such group, for example, researched and answered questions on the life of Roald Dahl. The school has a good range of up-to-date fiction and makes good use of non-fiction texts. There is a need to plan carefully and systematically for the teaching and developing of reading to ensure the children's reading skills are promoted adequately and the enjoyment of reading is encouraged. Overall, the standards in reading are too low.

2.15 In the Irish-medium unit, the children experience a wide range of appropriate activities which contribute to their learning in Irish and English. The teachers have realistically high expectations of the children and they provide a good degree of challenge in the tasks set. A wide range of teaching strategies is employed with group work used often to good effect.

2.16 In the Irish-medium classes, there is an appropriate, integrated approach to the development of talking and listening, reading and writing. The teachers have introduced recently a phonics programme in order to provide a consistent approach to spelling and to develop the children's word recognition skills. Talking and listening are promoted effectively in all classes. The children respond with enthusiasm to the stories in the 'Big Book' and in the question and answer sessions during circle time. Most of the children are becoming competent in communicating their ideas and thoughts in Irish; by the end of KS1 they display a sound acquisition of basic Irish. Skilful questioning by the teachers underpins much of the work in promoting the children's learning and in developing oracy and literacy in both languages. The older children have ample opportunities for extended discussion and the majority are able to express themselves with increasing fluency. A strong feature of the work of the unit is the high quality of the children's spontaneous and incidental use of the Irish language, often to initiate conversation and to ask questions.

2.17 There is a good emphasis on reading in the early years. A core reading scheme has been introduced and this is supplemented by novel work from year 4. In both languages, the children have opportunities to write about their novels and other reading materials. There is an agreed line of development in writing with a suitably balanced programme in both Irish and English. The younger children are beginning to produce short pieces of writing in their own words, and the older children are capable of extended written work; they have written a wide variety of short poems, stories, accounts and letters, much of which is of good quality; on occasions, this work is edited and revised, often using the computer. In addition, good use is made of ICT to promote sentence building and to extend the children's vocabulary. There is a need to develop and apply further the children's writing skills through work in other areas of the curriculum, in particular, history and science. The work in the Irish-medium unit benefits considerably from the thoughtful leadership and capable management of the committed co-ordinator whose main priority is the promotion of high standards in the children's learning in both languages.

2.18 The provision in the reception class is good. The staff ensure that the children have full access to a well-resourced pre-school curriculum. The children experience a wide range of activities which they clearly enjoy. There are good working relationships between the teacher and the classroom assistant.

2.19 The Principal has been in post since the inception of the school five years ago and has worked diligently to ensure the successful amalgamation of the three former schools into one large primary school. His responsibilities are wide ranging and include both the overall management of the nursery unit and a thriving Irish-medium unit both of which are integrated fully within the school. He communicates effectively with a wide variety of stakeholders and relates particularly well to the children. His management of the school generally is most efficient. As Principal of the school, together with the continuing full support of the two hard-working vice-principals, he now needs to provide strategic leadership in which planned developments in teaching and the curriculum are translated into real improvements in the standards of literacy attained by the children.



2.20 The current SDP conforms largely, but not yet completely to the requirements as stipulated by the DE (School Development Plans Regulations 2005). There is a need to review the plan to take account of the inspection findings and to focus development on those actions which have the greatest potential to add improvements in the children's experiences and in the standards they attain.

2.21 The assessment of the children's progress is undertaken systematically through a range of standardised tests and other assessment tools. The co-ordinator for assessment carries out her role most conscientiously. The school needs to use the extensive performance data more fully to ensure that the analysis, interpretation and evaluations which flow from it are used to inform and monitor key developments in learning and teaching, including individual tracking of the children's progress. Formative assessments facilitate planned discussions with the parents and informative annual reports are provided for them.

2.22 The school comprises two former school buildings connected to offer a good range of facilities for a variety of educational purposes; the building is well maintained and the standards of caretaking are excellent. The classroom assistants, the school librarian, the secretarial staff, the caretakers, the playground assistants, the catering staff, the crossing patrol and the cleaners make a most valuable contribution to the work of the school. Minor works to refurbish the toilets have been scheduled.

### 3. CONCLUSION

3.1 The strengths of the school include:

- the welcoming, friendly and pastoral ethos;
- the excellent working relationships between the teachers and the children;
- the wide range of extra-curricular activities provided for the children;
- the good behaviour and responses of the children;
- the hard-working and committed teachers;
- the quality of teaching observed which ranges from excellent to satisfactory;
- the contribution of the non-teaching staff and classroom assistants to the life and work of the school;
- the quality of provision in the nursery unit which is excellent;
- the high quality of provision in the Irish-medium unit; and
- the commitment of all the staff to review and development.

3.2 The areas for improvement include the need to:

- target developments in teaching and the curriculum to raise significantly the standards in literacy, specifically in reading and writing, across the school; and
- implement, through strategic leadership at senior management level, robust processes for monitoring and evaluating the effect the planned developments have on raising the children's attainments.

3.3 In the areas inspected, the school has strengths in its educational and pastoral provision. The inspection has identified important areas for improvement, which need to be addressed promptly if the school is to meet effectively the needs of all the learners.

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

#### 4. THE NURSERY UNIT

4.1 The nursery unit is accommodated in a purpose-built mobile situated in the grounds of St Francis' Primary School. The children come mainly from the surrounding area.

4.2 The parents were given opportunities to express their views about the nursery through the inspection questionnaires. The responses have been taken into account as part of the inspection. In their response, the parents expressed a high level of satisfaction with the nursery provision.

4.3 The nursery unit has in place appropriate procedures for pastoral care and child protection, which are in line with guidance given by the Department of Education.

4.4 The nursery unit has an appropriate healthy eating policy which is implemented by the staff and shared with the parents. Very good opportunities are provided for the children to participate in a wide range of energetic physical activities.

5. The main strengths within the nursery unit's educational and pastoral provision are as follows.

- The nursery unit has a very positive ethos based on very good working relationships at all levels. The staff provide a secure, supportive environment which helps the children grow in confidence and self-esteem. The children respond well to the staff's expectations and their behaviour is very good.
- Excellent communication and links have been established with the parents and they are encouraged to play a full role in the education of their children.
- The learning environment is attractive; good use is made of all the available space, both indoors and outdoors, to provide appropriate areas for play. The stimulating and well-organised environment helps to foster a settled climate for learning where the children's play is both purposeful and productive.
- The organisation of the daily timetable is carefully planned and provides a good balance of freely chosen play and activities organised by the staff. The snack and dinner routines allow appropriate opportunities for the children to take responsibility and to develop independence.
- The staff provide a broad and balanced programme which offers good or very good learning opportunities in all areas of the pre-school curriculum. The development of the children's language and thinking skills are particular strengths of the programme.
- The quality of the interaction between the staff and the children is consistently of a high standard and promotes the children's concentrated, co-operative and purposeful play.

- The children with special educational needs are identified early; the staff liaise with relevant agencies and draw up detailed plans containing clear and realistic steps to support the child's development. The quality of support within class is good; the encouragement the children receive is helping them to integrate fully into the nursery and ensures that their individual needs are met well.
- The staff have developed appropriate planning and assessment methods. The planning outlines clearly the learning the staff intend to promote; the observations of the children's responses to play are used to inform the planning. The staff evaluate the play programme regularly. There is evidence within this documentation of progression in the children's learning throughout the pre-school year.
- The teacher-in-charge of the nursery unit brings a high level of skill and enthusiasm to her work. She demonstrates a strong commitment to the welfare of the children and to the ongoing development of the nursery unit. She is an excellent role-model in her work with the children, and manages the nursery unit very effectively. There is a strong sense of team spirit among the hard-working and dedicated staff. The nursery unit is an integral part of the primary school and receives excellent support from the Principal.

6. There is a culture of reflection and review within the nursery. The staff have compiled a thoughtful development plan which highlights relevant aspects of the centre's work for further development. The staff are gaining skills that will assist them in the further development of self-evaluation leading to improvement.

7. The quality of education provided in this nursery unit is excellent. The educational and pastoral needs of the children are being very well met. The parents can have confidence in the nursery unit's capacity for sustained self-improvement.

No follow-up inspection is required.

## STATISTICAL INFORMATION ON ST FRANCIS' PRIMARY SCHOOL NURSERY UNIT

### 1. Details of Children

<b>Number of children:</b>	<b>Class 1</b>	<b>Class 2</b>
Attending full-time	26	26
Attending part-time	0	0
Under 3 years of age*	1	1
With statement of SEN**	0	0
At CoP stages 3 or 4***	2	0
At CoP stages 1 or 2***	5	0
With English as an additional language	1	1

\* On 1 July.

\*\* Special Educational Needs.

\*\*\* The stages refer to those set out in the Code of Practice for the Identification and Assessment of Special Educational Needs.

Percentage qualifying under DE admission criteria 1 or 2.	5%
Average attendance for the previous year.	94.1%

### 2. Duration of Sessions

<b>Full-time</b>	<b>Part-time: am</b>	<b>Part-time: pm</b>
5 hours	-	-

### 3. Details of Staff

<b>Number of:</b>	<b>Full-Time</b>	<b>Part-Time</b>
Teachers	2	0
Nursery Assistants	3	0
Qualified Nursery Assistants	3	0

<b>Number of: ****</b>	
Students	0
Trainees	0

\*\*\*\* Total placements since September of current year

### 4. Parental Questionnaires (to be completed by Inspection Services Branch)

Number issued	52
Percentage returned	63%
Number of written comments	13

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