



*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 James' Primary School and Nursery Unit
Newtownabbey**

Inspected: April 2008

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BASIC INFORMATION SHEET (BIS) - PRIMARY SCHOOLS

- | | | | | |
|----|-----|---|------|---|
| A. | i. | School: St James' Primary
Newtownabbey | iii. | Date of Inspection: W/B 14.04.08 |
| | ii. | School Reference Number: 303-6100 | iv. | Nature of Inspection: FI/Ma/ICT |

B.

School Year	2003/04	2004/05	2005/06	2006/07	2007/08
Year 1 Intake	24	31	30	22	28
Enrolments					
Primary	147	172	194	186	198
Reception	0	0	0	0	0
Nursery Class/Classes	78	78	78	78	78
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): 96.26%

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) | 12 | 2 | 0 |
|----|----|---|----|---|---|

- | | | | |
|-----|----------------------------|------|--------------|
| ii. | PTR (Pupil/Teacher Ratio): | 16.5 | NI PTR: 20.8 |
|-----|----------------------------|------|--------------|

- iii. Average Class Size: 28

- iv. Class Size (Range): 24 to 31

- | | | | |
|----|-----------------------------------|------|--|
| v. | Ancillary Support: | | |
| | Number of Hours Per Week : | i. | Clerical support: 37 |
| | | ii. | Official Making A Good Start Support: 25 |
| | | iii. | Additional hours of other classroom assistant support: 82.50 |

- vi. Percentage of children with statements of special educational needs: 2%

- vii. Total percentage of children on the Special Needs Register: 24%

- | | | |
|-------|---|---|
| viii. | Number of children who are not of statutory school age: | 0 |
|-------|---|---|

- ix. Percentage of children entitled to free school meals: 11%

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 St James' Primary School is situated off the Fernagh Road, in King's Walk, in south-east Antrim. The children come from a catchment area within a radius of four miles. The school's enrolment has increase steadily over the last few years. Eleven per cent of the children are entitled to free school meals.

1.2 The arrangements for the inspection of pastoral care included the completion of questionnaires by the parents as well as a meeting with the Board of Governors (governors), and discussions with a group of the children from year 6. Prior to the inspection, confidential questionnaires were sent to 110 parents; 42% of the questionnaires were returned to the Department of Education (DE); 15 parents took the opportunity to write additional comments. The parents and governors indicated a strong satisfaction with the work of the staff and the school; they highlighted the very positive inclusive ethos, the extremely supportive and hard-working staff and the wide range of extra-curricular activities provided. The teachers also completed confidential questionnaires; their responses were very supportive of all aspects of the life and work of the school. The children talked very positively about the school and indicated that they feel happy and safe. The few matters raised by the parents in the questionnaires were discussed with the Principal and the governors.

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

2. THE QUALITY OF THE CHILDREN'S WORK

2.1 The school provides a bright and inviting learning environment which celebrates the contributions of the children. The children come from many different religious and cultural backgrounds and are integrated in a most effective manner into the school community. Some parents commented positively on the increasing cultural diversity in the school community. The working relationships between the staff and the children are excellent. The children's behaviour is exemplary; they are respectful to their teachers and to one another, and very courteous to visitors.

2.2 The staff work hard to create an attractive and stimulating learning environment. There are many displays of the children's current and recent work in the corridors and classrooms; the displays are used effectively to improve the children's understanding and learning in a variety of areas. The non-teaching staff make a valuable contribution to the life and work of the school. The standard of cleaning and caretaking is very high.

2.3 The teachers make effective use of praise and encouragement to motivate the children. The good balance between rewards and sanctions contributes well to the positive ethos, which is evident throughout the school. The School Council provides good opportunities for the children to become increasingly involved in aspects of decision-making in the day-to-day working of the school.

2.4 The school provides an extensive range of extra-curricular activities for the children. These include modern languages, camogie, cricket, soccer, art and homework clubs. Through the extra-curricular programme, the children have many opportunities to develop their skills, abilities and confidence. In addition, their learning and social development are enhanced through participation in speech and drama festivals, educational visits, and community events. During the school day, opportunities are provided for the children to develop skills in music and drama while innovative approaches such as the Peer Mediation programme further enhance the children's experiences. The school is taking part in the Extended Schools Initiative.

2.5 The quality of the arrangements for pastoral care and child protection has important strengths. The school has procedures in place which implement the guidance outlined in the relevant DE circulars and has identified appropriately a few areas for improvement which it is currently implementing.

2.6 Among the strengths are:

- the quality of the working relationships throughout the school;
- the high quality of pastoral care provision;
- the highly effective reward system which acknowledges positive behaviour and the children's achievements;
- the contribution made by the support staff to the children's well-being and their learning experiences;
- the information regularly displayed for the parents throughout the school;
- the high priority given to the health and emotional well-being of the staff and the children; and
- the effective communication and working with other agencies.

2.7 The few areas for improvement identified include the need:

- to consult further with the staff, children and parents when revising policies;
- to update and review the training in child protection for the school meals staff and the governors; and
- to ensure that the temporary staff and the families of new children, including those with English as an additional language, clearly understand the arrangements for pastoral care and child protection.

2.8 The school gives very good 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 the breakfast club, the Comenius project and the whole-school food survey to influence canteen provision, which encourage the children to adopt

healthy lifestyles. The few areas for improvement identified include the need to incorporate an assessment of the nature and quality of the school's arrangements for health and well-being practices within the school development plan (SDP) in order to comply with statutory regulations.

2.9 The quality of teaching in the majority of the lessons observed was good or better with a minority being outstanding. In the most effective practice the lessons were well planned, learning outcomes were clearly identified and shared with the children who were clear on what they were expected to learn. These lessons were conducted with an appropriate degree of pace, teachers employed a range of whole-class, group and individual approaches and the progress made by the children was evaluated during the plenary session.

2.10 In the foundation stage (FS), the teachers place increasing emphasis on play-based learning; the staff have worked hard to create an attractive and stimulating learning environment which takes account of the children's needs, interests and stage of development. The staff plan thematically and comprehensively for the children's play-based learning in the FS. During the inspection the children experienced a wide range of appropriate and challenging activities through which they were encouraged to observe, investigate and be imaginative and creative. During play the children are enabled to make choices, share ideas and participate in thoughtful role-play themes which allow them to explore and consolidate their learning. There is good interaction between the staff and the children to develop the children's thinking skills and personal capabilities, and independence. The staff have made a valuable start to the development and evaluation of the planning and evaluation of the children's play that extends their interaction with the children.

2.11 In recent years the staff have concentrated on embedding and developing further the good practice initiated through the participation in the Northern Ireland Numeracy Strategy, with emphasis being placed on the development of mathematical language, processes and mental mathematics. The co-ordinator provides good leadership and has devised a useful action plan, which focuses on improvement in standards through the development of thinking skills and personal capabilities. He has made a good start in monitoring and evaluating the quality of learning in mathematics through observing classes, and examining the children's books and the teachers' planning.

2.12 There are many positive aspects to the mathematics provision within the school. The mathematics overview for each year group provides a useful framework within which the teachers create their medium- and short-term planning. The medium-term plans identify clearly the intended learning outcomes for each topic, the differentiated activities and support for the ability range within each class and the ICT resources to be used to enhance learning and teaching. The majority of teachers record the extent and quality of the children's learning and use their observations to inform future planning.

2.13 Practical approaches are used effectively to develop mathematical concepts and to demonstrate the importance of mathematics for everyday life. The teachers encourage the children to talk about mathematics and to use precise mathematical language to enhance their understanding of important concepts. They place a strong emphasis on developing the children's problem solving skills. In the FS and in key stage (KS) 1, the children were encouraged to take time to think, to ask questions and talk about their mathematical learning.

As the children progress through KS2, the majority of the children continue to develop their knowledge and skills through a combination of well-planned practical activities, discussions and written work. They have opportunities to collect, represent and analyse data, to interpret their findings and, in the best practice to share it with each other.

2.14 Increasingly, ICT is used to support the children's learning across the curriculum. Good examples of the use of appropriate software to enliven mathematical learning were observed; the interactive whiteboards were generally used well to develop investigative skills and to engage all the children in their work. The ICT co-ordinator is providing good leadership and is focusing on the development of the children's ICT skills as they move through the school. The children participate successfully in the ICT Accreditation Scheme at KS2 organised by the Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment.

2.15 By the end of KS1 the majority of children have acquired a sound understanding of basic shape, time, data-handling, and number. By the end of year 7 the majority of the children have achieved good standards in mathematics.

2.16 The school uses a variety of formal and informal assessment procedures to monitor the children's learning. It is important that the school makes greater use of the available bench-marking data available at the end of KS1 and KS2 to promote further improvement in standards.

2.17 There are effective procedures and records for keeping the parents informed about their child's progress, which include written reports and formal parent-teacher consultations once a year. In addition, the parents are encouraged to meet with the teachers, both on a formal and informal basis, to discuss their child's educational and pastoral needs.

2.18 The teachers mark the children's work regularly. In the majority of classes marking is of a supportive nature that praises the children's efforts. In the best practice the teachers are beginning to implement assessment for learning strategies and to advise the children on how they can improve their work. The school has identified this as an area for continued development.

2.19 The school has identified 24% of its children as having special educational needs. A further 24% are identified as requiring support with English as an additional language. The school has demonstrated a considerable commitment to inclusivity and to supporting the varying needs of these children in a sensitive and caring manner. This is exemplified by the comprehensive measures put in place to diagnose, support, assess and record the children's learning and progress. This process is effectively managed by the special educational needs co-ordinator. An effective SEN policy and appropriate annual action plans have been created to develop this aspect of the school provision. Good progress has been made in addressing the requirements of the special educational needs and disability order within the school.

2.20 Appropriate individual education plans are in place to guide the support for children with special educational needs and these are reviewed and amended on a regular basis. The roles and responsibilities of the teachers, classroom assistants, children and parents are clearly set out and implemented effectively. Support is provided through both in-class and withdrawal sessions. In class, teachers and classroom assistants work in partnership to provide appropriately differentiated activities which take account of the range of abilities

within the class and target additional support classes. In addition, a small number of children in year 2 are involved in the Reading Recovery programme. The school also accesses the support services of external agencies which include a Multi Agency Support Team's speech and language therapy, an audiology service and educational psychologists. There is a high level of interaction between all those working to assist the children's learning. The progress of the children is closely monitored and there is clear evidence that actions taken have resulted in improvements in their learning and teaching.

2.21 The school has made excellent progress in developing its provision for children with English as an additional language. The recent appointment of a full-time teacher to focus on the needs of this group of children highlights the responsiveness of the school to the developing needs of the local community and demonstrates the school's commitment to its mission statement. An extensive audit of provision for ethnic minority children has been carried out and substantial measures have been implemented as a result. These include the revision of school policies, training for staff, the creation of multi-lingual signs and a visual welcome booklet, the translation of educational literature for parents and the development of a buddy system for newly enrolled children. These measures contribute to the creation of a learning environment where all children feel valued and diversity is recognised and celebrated. Of particular note is the excellent specialised learning support provided by the teacher who co-ordinates this aspect of the school's work. Personalised lessons and assessment activities based on the Common European Framework of Reference enable children to make very good progress in reading, writing and oral language skills while in-class support facilitates the children's progress in other aspects of their learning. The school has identified appropriately the need for further development of the provision, in particular, through the addition of appropriate resources and ICT hardware and software.

2.22 The school has developed effective links with other schools, both locally and internationally. Since 2001 the school has been involved in a Comenius Project with schools from Germany, Italy, Spain, Turkey, Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland. The school has benefited from the sharing of ideas and good practice within this group.

2.23 The Principal has been in post for 16 years. He has a strong sense of purpose and his concern and care for the children and the staff are evident. He promotes a culture of inclusivity within the life and work of the school, has engendered a very strong sense of team-work and promotes a climate where the children and staff are valued. He is ably supported by the Senior Management Team. He has focused on the development of certain aspects of the school's provision, including the nursery unit and links with the parents and the community, both locally and nationally. The staff are very hard-working and deeply committed to the children's education and welfare; they have worked together to review, update and put in place effective policies to inform learning and teaching. There is a high level of commitment from the co-ordinators and staff to provide a supportive and pastoral environment in which the children's educational, cultural and social development are promoted and successfully met.

2.24 The SDP has been agreed by the staff and the governors and in the main has identified appropriate areas for development; it helps to guide the immediate work in relation to the priorities that have been set for the present school year. In its current format, the SDP does not fully comply with the Education (School Development Plans) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2005. The further refinement of the SDP has the potential to assist the senior management of the school and the staff to focus clearly on key strategies and targets, and to

help them to plan, monitor and evaluate improvement more effectively. The school now needs to consult more widely with the parents, teachers and children on a variety of school improvement matters. In addition they now need to agree on and implement whole-school systems to monitor and evaluate the school's provision at all levels to inform planning and to promote continuing improvement.

2.25 The quality of the accommodation is satisfactory. The staff have worked hard to maximise the attractiveness and utility of the accommodation available.

3. **CONCLUSION**

3.1 The strengths of the school include:

- the very positive, caring and inclusive ethos which permeates the life and work of the school;
- the quality of most of the teaching observed which was good, and at times outstanding;
- the wide range of extra-curricular experiences for the children and the good work being developed through the Extended Schools Initiative;
- the enthusiasm, motivation and good behaviour of the children and the high standards achieved in mathematics;
- the quality of the provision for children who experience difficulties with aspects of their learning, including those for whom English is an additional language; and
- the range of approaches used by the staff to meet the individual academic, social and emotional needs of the children including innovative programmes such as peer mediation.

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

No follow-inspection is required.

4. THE NURSERY UNIT

4.1 The double nursery unit is situated in St James Primary School; it offers one full-time session and two part-time sessions. There are a significant number of younger children in the part-time sessions. Since the last inspection, there has been a full change in the staff.

4.2 The parents and the staff were given opportunities to express their views about the nursery through the inspection questionnaires. The responses indicated a very high level of satisfaction with the provision. The small number of issues raised about communication with parents have been shared with the staff.

4.3 The quality of the arrangements for pastoral care and child protection is very good. The nursery has appropriate policies and procedures for child protection. The inspection evidence indicates that the staff implement these policies and procedures effectively and consistently to safeguard the children. The nursery should complete the review of the behaviour management policy and share it with the parents as a priority.

4.4 The nursery gives good attention to promoting healthy eating and physical activity, and has effective policies and programmes in place to encourage the children to adopt healthy lifestyles.

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

- There is a very positive ethos based on caring and supportive working relationships between the staff and the children. The children are well behaved and respond well to the staff's high expectations.
- The staff work hard to create an attractive and stimulating learning environment throughout the nursery. It is enhanced by many examples of the children's own art work.
- The wide range of activities provides good or very good opportunities for learning in all areas of the pre-school curriculum. Particular strengths include the promotion of the children's creativity, imagination, language and literacy, confidence and independence. There are many examples of good concentrated and productive play.
- The staff value and support the children's own ideas and foster their self-esteem. There are many examples of skilful interaction when the staff promote a wide range of language and learning as they engage with the children.
- The smooth daily timetable is well developed to give a good balance between extended periods of free play and group activities.
- The teacher in charge of the nursery is well organised and very effective in her own practice; she fosters a sense of team spirit among the hard-working staff.

4.6 The inspection identified areas for improvement. The following are the most important areas that need attention.

- Develop further the assessment methods to ensure the children's progress is recorded systematically and the information is used to inform the practice.
- Develop the planning for outdoor play.

4.7 The nursery has a development plan with appropriate targets for improvement. The staff have developed useful methods of self-evaluation and there is clear evidence that the process has led to improvements in the children's learning experiences.

4.8 The nursery has important strengths in most of its educational and pastoral provision. The inspection has identified minor areas for improvement which the nursery has the capacity to address.

The nursery's progress on the areas for improvement will be followed-up by monitoring visits, conducted by the District Inspector.

STATISTICAL INFORMATION ON ST JAMES' PRIMARY SCHOOL NURSERY UNIT, ANTRIM (303-6100)

1. Details of Children

Number of children:	Class 1	Class 2
Attending full-time	26	0
Attending part-time	26	26
Under 3 years of age*	12	13
With statement of special educational needs	0	0
At CoP stages 3 or 4**	0	0
At CoP stages 1 or 2**	0	0
With English as an additional language full-time	2	0
With English as an additional language part-time	3	4

* On 1 July.

** 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.	6%
Average attendance for the previous year.	92%

2. Duration of Sessions

Full-time	Part-time: am	Part-time: pm
4½ hours	2½ hours	2½ hours

3. Details of Staff

Number of:	Full-Time	Part-Time
Teachers	1	1
Nursery Assistants	0	1
Qualified Nursery Assistants	1	1

Number of: ****	
Students	0
Trainees	1

**** Total placements since September of current year

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

Number issued	78
Number returned	32
Number of written comments	15

HEALTH AND SAFETY

- The school bell has a fire drill tone and rings for a prolonged period.
- The fire door in the children's toilets provides open access from outside and is therefore a potential hazard.

HEALTH AND SAFETY (NURSERY UNIT)

- The staff need to ensure there is adequate supervision when the children are engaged in outdoor play.

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