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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 John the Baptist Girls' Primary School
Andersonstown

Inspected: November 2008

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BASIC INFORMATION SHEET (BIS) - PRIMARY SCHOOLS

- A. i. **School:** St John the Baptist Girls’ iii. **Date of Inspection:** W/B 24.11.08
 ii. **School Reference Number:** 103-6091 iv. **Nature of Inspection:** Focused

B.

School Year	2004/05	2005/06	2006/07	2007/08	2008/09
Year 1 Intake	38	30	39	28	30
Enrolments					
Primary	382	332	309	287	246
Reception	0	0	0	0	0
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):

94.6%

	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) | 12.6 | 0 | 0 |
| ii. PTR (Pupil/Teacher Ratio): | NI PTR: 20.8 | | |
| iii. Average Class Size: | 22.4 | | |
| iv. Class Size (Range): | 16 to 30 | | |
| v. Ancillary Support:
Number of Hours Per Week : | | | |
| i. Clerical support: | | 53 | |
| ii. Official Making A Good Start Support: | | 34 | |
| iii. Additional hours of other classroom assistant support: | | 30 | |
| vi. Percentage of children with statements of special educational needs: | | 0.41% | |
| vii. Total percentage of children on the Special Needs Register: | | 28.5% | |
| viii. Number of children who are not of statutory school age: | | 0 | |
| ix. Percentage of children entitled to free school meals: | | 20.74% | |

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 SCHOOL CONTEXT

St John the Baptist Girls' Primary School is situated on Finaghy Road North in the Andersonstown area and accommodated in the same building as St John the Baptist Boys' School. The children come from the surrounding area. There has been a steady decline in the enrolment over the last number of years; the current enrolment stands at 246 children. At the time of the inspection, approximately 21% of the children were entitled to free school meals and just under 30% were on the special needs register.

The school is currently being considered for an amalgamation with the adjoining boys' school. The uncertainty and delay in decisions surrounding the proposed amalgamation need to be addressed by the Board of Governors (governors), the employing authority and the Department of Education (DE), as a matter of urgency, in the best interests of the staff, children, parents and wider community.

1.2 FOCUS

The inspection focused on the quality of the work in English/literacy and mathematics, and the contribution of information and communication technology (ICT) in promoting and supporting learning and teaching in these subject areas. The schools' arrangements for pastoral care, including child protection 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 a confidential questionnaire prior to the inspection, as well as meetings with representatives of the governors, a group of parents and a group of children from year 6.

One hundred and twenty-two questionnaires were issued to parents; 30 of these were returned to the DE. Sixteen returns included additional written comments. Of those who responded, almost all expressed a high level of satisfaction with the school's educational and pastoral provision. In particular, parents highlighted the good levels of discipline, the benefits of the breakfast club for working parents, the good results and the dedicated staff. There was less satisfaction with the current state of repair and deficiencies in the layout of the building, and the delay in the proposed amalgamation. Views were expressed about the negative impact these were having on the enrolment figures in the school. The few areas of concern that were raised have been discussed with a representative from the governors.

A small number of teachers completed the online questionnaire. The responses were highly affirmative of the work of the staff and the pastoral care of the children. There was less satisfaction with levels of communication within the school.

The children in year 6 reported that they felt happy and safe in school; they knew who to talk to if they had any concerns. Almost all of the children commented on their involvement in and enjoyment of a wide range of extra-curricular activities.

1.4 PASTORAL CARE

The quality of the arrangements for pastoral care in the school is good. Strengths include the effective promotion of the children's very good behaviour and care for one another, the extra-curricular activities provided through the extended schools programme, the opportunities given to the children to express their views through the school's council, and the consideration given to improving the children's well-being through the buddy system and the use of playground games.

1.5 CHILD PROTECTION

The school has satisfactory arrangements in place for safeguarding children. These arrangements broadly reflect the guidance issued by the relevant Department but the following minor areas need to be addressed: the school needs to ensure that a flow chart indicating who to contact in the event of a concern is included in the prospectus; during this current period of transition, and accompanying changes in roles and responsibilities, all staff and parents need to be kept fully up-to-date with any changes made to the designated teachers for child protection; and the management need to ensure that all staff have a full understanding of the procedures for reporting a concern.

1.6 HEALTHY EATING AND PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

The school gives very good attention to promoting healthy eating and physical activity. There is a breakfast club which offers a choice of healthy foods and the children have easy access to drinking water. The school promotes a variety of initiatives which encourages the children to adopt healthy lifestyles, such as the adoption of a healthy break, "Walk to School" Week, and the use of after school sports and dance classes.

1.7 ETHOS

The school ethos is underpinned by the staff's strong sense of commitment to the children's education and pastoral care. The children's behaviour is excellent; they are friendly and welcoming to visitors. The staff work hard to make the best use of all the available space to create an attractive and positive learning environment; including attractive displays of the children's work and achievements.

1.8 LINKS WITH OTHERS

The school has developed good links with others through a wide range of initiatives. These include Orangefield Primary School through the schools' community relations programme, St John the Baptist Boys' School in conjunction with the Extended Schools programme, and post primary schools through the Better Schools Partnerships. The reading partnerships organised through the Business in the Community initiative involves effectively both parents and business workers in giving targeted reading support to individual children.

2. ACHIEVEMENTS AND STANDARDS

2.1 ENGLISH AND LITERACY

The overall quality of the provision for English and literacy is good. The children experience a well-planned English programme which provides appropriate progression in their acquisition of necessary knowledge allied to a range of key communication skills. The children enjoy their work in English, and, by the end of key stage (KS) 2, most of them reach good to very good standards across a broad range of English work, in line with their abilities.

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 questions. When given these opportunities the children were able to express their opinions and shared their views with others. For example, in a year 6 class focusing on the key factors associated with a healthy lifestyle, the children listened attentively, displayed good oral skills and produced written work of a high quality in subsequent group work.

Overall the standard of the children's reading is good. There are a few children in all the classes who experience difficulty with reading. The school has introduced recently an additional approach to teaching phonological awareness. There are early indications of a beneficial impact of this programme; it is important that this programme is tied in effectively with an appropriate range of reading strategies already used in the school. There is an adequate variety of commercial and teacher-produced resources to support the children's learning. While there have been extra resources made available recently, the children would benefit greatly, from a much wider range of additional reading material to augment the materials already used throughout the school.

The standard of presentation of the children's written work in English and across the curriculum is very good. In a large majority of the classes in all the key stages, the children consolidate their learning in English well through an imaginative well-planned and a good balance of practical and written exercises. In the foundation stage (FS) the children have opportunities to become familiar with different forms of print and experiment, with informal mark making during role play in, for example, the optician's and hospital areas. The use of simple sentence structure is developing through shared writing activities. While there is evidence of independent writing of a good quality there is a need to ensure this aspect is developed and progresses consistently throughout the FS. In the FS and KS1, Big Books are used effectively as a starting point for developing and integrating appropriate talking, listening and reading activities including story writing. In KS2, the children engage in writing in a wide range of formats. In both key stages, the children talk about and write poems with sensitivity and to a good standard. In a few classes in KS1 and 2, the children need more frequent opportunity for independent extended writing in English and across the curriculum.

In the best practice seen in a significant minority of the classes, the work was suitably paced, well matched to the children's varying needs and abilities, and, in particular, encouraged them to take responsibility for aspects of their own learning. In these classes, oral work was particularly well managed and the children had frequent opportunities to talk to, and learn

from, each other during group work. In addition, the work includes challenging problem-solving activities which add appeal, relevance and a degree of appropriate challenge to the learning. A key priority is to extend this best practice seen in English to all of the classes.

2.2 MATHEMATICS AND NUMERACY

The overall quality of the provision for mathematics in the school is good. The children have a broad and balanced experience of mathematics across both key stages. There are appropriate action plans to develop the teaching of mathematics which include appropriate areas for improvement; for example, the further development of the children's problem-solving and investigative skills. The inspection findings confirm this as an area requiring further development. There are good opportunities to develop useful skills in mental mathematical operations and in the use of practical activities across all classes.

In the FS, the children experience a variety of well planned play-based activities through which they develop their early mathematical language, concepts and understanding. There are good opportunities during guided mathematical activities to sort, match, count, compare, and make patterns and sequences in a variety of contexts. They are able to access an appropriate range of computer software packages to enhance their understanding of the subject. Appropriate practical activities help develop their understanding of number, money, shape and handling data.

At KS1, generally, the children have useful opportunities to develop their understanding of number, measures, shape, and handling data. In the best practice observed, the children work with mathematics in real and relevant contexts; they share their ideas with each other and so demonstrate clear understanding about patterns and relationships in their exploration of number; they add significant challenge to their experience through self-generated guided extension activities. The children achieve sound to very good standards and, in most instances, they use ICT with confidence and interest to reinforce their understanding of their work in mathematics.

At KS2, most of the children achieve good to very good standards across the areas of number, measure, and shape and space. The children have regular opportunities to report, on a class basis, on what they have done; these activities should be extended to provide greater discussion among the children about their work, and so develop their greater confidence and understanding of mathematical concepts and applications. In the best practice, the children engage enthusiastically in challenging extension activities which promote their interest and understanding; in general, this good work needs to be more consistently implemented across the school. Overall the children enjoy their mathematics and, by the end of KS2, are well prepared for the next stage of their education.

2.3 INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

Information and communication technology is used very effectively in most of the classes to enrich the educational experiences of the children. Teachers are identifying frequent opportunities for the use of ICT to support the children's learning in English and mathematics. At KS1, for example, children use interactive white boards and customised

software well to enhance their learning about number and shape: at KS2, children use ICT effectively to explore, express and exhibit their own work such as, moving image technology, research and news sheets. Where classrooms offer ICT access, the teachers use technology confidently and integrate it effectively across the curriculum. The children at FS would benefit from having computers in the immediate vicinity of their classroom.

3. QUALITY OF PROVISION FOR LEARNERS

3.1 PLANNING

The teacher's written documentation which guides the learning and teaching of English and mathematics is overall of a good quality. The school has identified the need to adopt a common format for the written planning for English and the inspection endorses this as a medium term priority. The planning for mathematics is coherent and systematic; it gives clear exemplars of appropriate mathematical content to guide teachers and promote good standards. The school is in the process of amending and developing its planning more fully, in line with the revised Northern Ireland Curriculum.

3.2 TEACHING

The quality of most of the teaching observed was good and a significant minority was very good. In the best practice, the teachers promoted opportunities for the children to work independently and creatively, and made consistent and judicious use of open-ended questions which drew extended responses from the children. Tasks were differentiated well, matched to children's ability and presented within an interesting and relevant learning context. Topic work was effectively planned to make effective use of cross-curricular opportunities. In addition, teachers presented clear expected learning outcomes and success criteria for lessons, and involved the children where appropriate in the planning process. In the less effective practice, questions were closed and the children had insufficient thinking time to consider their answers. At times, there was too much focus on the completion of activities rather than on the quality of the learning taking place.

3.3 ASSESSMENT

The teachers make excellent and effective use of a wide range of assessment data, including that obtained from standardised test scores, to identify performance trends, and set appropriate targets for improving further the children's standards. The school has made good use of DE benchmarking data to review and measure the children's attainments. The assessment co-ordinator has been very effective in leading this work. The teachers mark the children's work regularly, often with encouraging and supportive comments. In the best practice, the written marking frequently incorporates useful comments which allow the children, through their corrections, to improve the standards they reach. This excellent practice needs to be disseminated to all the classes.

3.4 SPECIAL/ADDITIONAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS

The policy for special educational needs was reviewed and updated and provision for the children is met through withdrawal sessions involving individual, pairs, small groups and through differentiated work within the classroom. A significant strength of the provision is the early identification procedures, which focus appropriately on intervention strategies based

on use of assessment data, effective diagnostic analysis and teacher observation. The individual educational plans (IEPs) generally contain clear and measurable short term goals and the children's progress is tracked appropriately on ongoing assessment data, evidence of increasing parental involvement, and on uptake of strategies outlined for use with the children at home. The special education needs co-ordinator (SENCO) needs to ensure there is a consistency of approach in how the IEPs are drawn up in conjunction with the class teachers. Children who make satisfactory to good progress in the additional learning support classes are appropriately discontinued. Good efforts are made to support and involve the parents in helping their own children through workshops and information.

In the regular withdrawal sessions the children receive intensive reading and phonics support; these are provided by support teachers from the school itself, the adjoining boys' school, and peripatetic support from a range of agencies. In the best practice, the teacher is appropriately prepared, highly supportive of the children, uses a range of strategies to enhance the children's literacy skills, and involves the children in the setting of personal targets.

The SENCO, who was absent during the inspection, has attended some relevant training and provided some appropriate in service training. There is a need to monitor more consistently, the children's progress in literacy and numeracy against the targets previously set to promote improved attainment, the quality and effectiveness of support provided, and to ensure that there are more effective communication systems in place between the children, the teachers and the parents.

4. LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

4.1 LEADERSHIP

The Principal, appointed in 2002, was absent due to illness at the time of the inspection; a senior teacher was made acting principal during this period of time. There is currently no Vice-principal. In recent years, the school has under the leadership of the Principal, focused on developing effective links with the local community and parents, introduced a number of valuable initiatives to support the pastoral care of the children and made good progress in collecting and using data to inform learning and teaching. The English and mathematics co-ordinators provide effective leadership and support within their areas of responsibility.

The current management structures need to be reviewed and simplified to reflect the changing organisational needs of the school and to promote more effectively, whole-school development/improvement within each area of responsibility. The Principal and senior management team need to develop processes which will ensure more effective communication at all levels throughout the school and help bring about a greater degree of collegiality among all the staff.

4.2 PLANNING FOR IMPROVEMENT

The teaching staff are reflective in their approaches to their classroom planning and teaching. While there is evidence of continuous improvement in a number of key areas the management and leadership need to ensure there is a more systematic approach to whole school self-evaluation and improvement which involves more fully all of the staff. The school improvement plan identifies a range of appropriate priorities for development. The school development plan (SDP) should now be reviewed and amended in order to meet more

fully the requirements of the DE School Development Plan Regulations/Schedule 2005/19 and to take account of the inspection findings. This should include for example, methods for disseminating best practice, and monitoring and evaluation using a greater range of first-hand evidence, including the children's written work and classroom observation to inform, if necessary, any adjustments to learning and teaching.

4.3 ACCOMMODATION

The school has a number of excess classrooms due to the falling enrolment. The school aims to utilise this space in the best interests of the children, for example as additional play space for FS. During the time of the inspection the toilet areas were being refurbished and the roof was being repaired.

4.4 RESOURCES AND FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT

The school has adequate resources to support the teaching and learning. Interactive whiteboards have been provided in a number of classrooms and there is a computer suite. The secure entrance area is shared with the adjoining boys school. The governors have joint responsibility for both the boys and the girls school. Effective and collaborative use is being made of the money provided through extended schools to support parents and enhance the children's learning experiences.

The school is currently running a substantial financial deficit which is projected to increase further.

5. CONCLUSION

5.1 The strengths of the school include:

- the good to very good standards achieved by most of the children in literacy and numeracy;
- the good quality of most of the teaching;
- the effective use of an extensive range of quantitative data to track children's progress and meet their individual needs;
- the development of the effective use of ICT to support learning in most classes;
- the very good links with parents, the local community and the adjoining boys' school; and
- the hard-working staff who demonstrate a strong commitment to the children's welfare and hold high expectations of their academic achievements.

5.2 The areas for improvement include the need:

- for the Principal and leadership at all levels to review and simplify roles and responsibilities, and ensure more effective methods of communication between all staff; and

- to further develop the self-evaluation and related SDP procedures, in order to focus more specifically on the dissemination of best practice.

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 organisation has the capacity to address. The Education and Training Inspectorate will monitor the school's progress on the areas for improvement.

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