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*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 Joseph's Primary School and Nursery Unit
Dunloy**

Inspected: November 2006

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 St Joseph's Primary School is situated in the village of Dunloy, County Antrim. The children who attend the school live in the village and the surrounding rural area. The enrolment has remained steady over the last five years and currently stands at 240. Approximately 6% of the children are entitled to free school meals. Thirteen per cent of the children have been identified as requiring additional support with aspects of their learning. There have been significant changes in staffing; six new teachers have been appointed during the last four-year period.

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) and a group of children from year 6. Eighty-five questionnaires were issued to parents; approximately 65% were returned to the Department of Education (DE) of which 24 contained additional written comments. The responses from the parental questionnaires indicated that the parents are strongly supportive of the work of the school. At the meeting with the BoG, they expressed their appreciation of the dedication and hard work of all the staff in the school, commenting particularly on the good educational provision, the supportive parent/teacher relationships, the school's welcoming and caring ethos and the high esteem in which the school is held within the local community. The children talked enthusiastically about the wide range of creative and sporting extra-curricular activities, the school's merit scheme and the learning and pastoral support given by the Principal, teachers and support staff. From the discussions, the children are aware of what to do if they have any worries about their safety and well-being. The Education and Training Inspectorate has reported the main findings to the Principal and representatives of the BoG.

1.3 The inspection focused on the work in English and information and communication technology (ICT) across the curriculum and the effectiveness of the school's special educational needs provision. The inspection also evaluated the school's procedures for pastoral care, including child protection.

2. THE QUALITY OF THE CHILDREN'S WORK

2.1 The school is characterised by its strong sense of community. The staff promote effectively a climate of pastoral care and concern for the children. The standard of the children's behaviour is excellent; they are open, friendly and talk confidently to one another, to their teachers and to visitors. The varied and stimulating displays of the children's work and achievements enhance the appearance of the corridors and classrooms; many of them promote the children's learning. The school is well maintained.

2.2 The school places a high priority on establishing and maintaining strong links between home and school. The school prospectus includes important information on the school policies and other relevant details on the work of the school. The parents are very supportive of the school; through fund-raising events, organised by the active Parent Teacher Association, they have provided additional educational resources, such as computer hardware and software and books, for the children, as well as a range of sports equipment.

2.3 The school provides an extensive range of extra-curricular activities including opportunities for the children to become involved in programmes supported by local businesses, sports clubs and other cultural groups. The activities, including gaelic games, soccer, netball, golf, art, the ICT club, drama and music, help the children to develop further their social skills and sense of inter-dependence through working with one another.

2.4 The high quality of the arrangements for pastoral care and child protection is a significant feature of the school and supports the mission statement by encouraging the children 'to be the best person you can be'. The school has procedures in place which implement fully the guidance outlined in the relevant DE Circulars. The BoG, staff, parents and children are fully aware of the school's procedures and have had the opportunity to contribute to a range of helpful policies that guide the work of the school. Among the strengths are the useful ways of communicating with parents and the BoG, the successful strategies used to encourage good working relations between all the children and the particularly effective leadership of the teacher in charge of pastoral care and child protection.

2.5 The school pays particular attention to promoting health and well-being. A strong emphasis is placed on the development of appropriate policies and programmes which encourage the children to adopt healthy lifestyles. There is a good commitment to promoting healthy eating and to improving the children's eating habits. There are opportunities for all the children to participate in a wide range of physical activities. As a result of this approach, the children demonstrate a good understanding of the significance of making healthy life choices.

2.6 The quality of teaching is always satisfactory, in most cases it is good, and on occasions it is excellent. In the best practice, effective use is made of appropriate teaching strategies designed to provide challenge in the children's learning and to develop their independence, including the application of ICT. In the less effective practice, there was undue emphasis on routine tasks or the work was over-directed by the teacher, with insufficient challenge for the more able children.

2.7 The teachers prepare detailed schemes of work which set out an appropriate range of topics from the areas of study; they make good use of six-weekly plans and prepare well for individual lessons. In some instances the planning has identified effectively the opportunities for integrating the children's learning experiences across the curriculum. The teachers plan across the year groups, facilitating a sound focus on progression; this good work has developed further to embed assessment for learning in the planning process. Increasingly, the planning focuses more clearly on the learning intentions and how these are to be achieved. In addition, the teachers plan to develop further the children's ability to work independently, to assess their own performance and to improve the quality of their work. These proposed developments are in line with the findings of the inspection.

2.8 Throughout the school an important focus is placed on developing the children's talking and listening skills through an effective programme of activities. Most of the children display confidence and enthusiasm in their oral work; they are able to, in response to the teachers' skilful open-ended questioning, organise their ideas and provide extended answers. In many instances during the inspection, the children listened attentively to their teachers and to one another. The teachers set a positive tone that encourages the children to contribute to the plenary and the small group discussions. The children's talking and listening skills are well-developed and are often linked effectively to reading and writing activities.

2.9 The teachers have undertaken a review of their approaches to the teaching of reading; an appropriate phonics programme as well as shared, guided and modelled reading strategies are used effectively to encourage the children to read, understand and enjoy books. Within a broad language development framework, the teachers use effectively a levelled reading scheme to encourage the children to respond imaginatively and critically to what they read. By the end of key stage (KS) 1, the majority of the children read with an increasing level of independence and in many instances they discuss, with their teacher and with one another, the characters and events in their favourite stories. In KS2, the children enjoy reading a wide range of fiction and non-fiction material that is of interest to them; they are keen to contribute to discussions in class on the books they are currently reading. Appropriately, the older children are encouraged to develop the skills needed to explore and infer meaning from the text. The library is well-stocked and the children have developed appropriate strategies to help them select books that they are more likely to read and enjoy.

2.10 The development from emergent to extended and independent writing is developed effectively throughout the school. The teachers have worked hard to develop links between the children's oral work and its application in a range of appropriate shared and modelled writing activities and contexts across the curriculum. The children have opportunities for writing in many different forms and for a range of purposes; they respond with interest and motivation to the opportunities that are presented and some of the creative and imaginative work is of a good quality. Increasingly, the writing activities provide opportunities for the children to work independently and in groups and to develop their own ideas. For example, many of the children have a keen interest in drama and write scripts for plays and sketches that they then perform during school assemblies. Appropriately, the school continues to focus on developing the children's understanding of grammar, in the context of reading texts and writing sessions, and on developing a clear handwriting style.

2.11 The school is making good progress in the development of ICT as a resource for learning and teaching. The co-ordinator provides effective leadership and promotes strongly the use of ICT throughout the school.

2.12 By the end of KS2, the children's ICT skills are generally good and they use a range of software to support their learning across the curriculum, for example, they integrate various packages to make high quality presentations. The year 7 children demonstrated their competence in ICT skills through the work produced for the Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment Accreditation scheme. All the teachers have identified the importance of monitoring their ICT use through Performance Review: Staff Development (PRSD); further whole-school evaluation is required. The staff need to consider how ICT can be used to develop further the children's learning and how it can be integrated more effectively into the whole curriculum.

2.13 The Principal and KS1 teachers recognise the value and importance of children learning through play. Following visits to other schools, additional planning and useful discussions, the staff have been reviewing and developing the programme for play. The KS1 teachers are making good progress. The thematic planning is designed to support the children's learning, their sense of achievement and their social development. The children have appropriate opportunities to develop their decision-making skills, to talk with their peers and engage with the adults present; the teachers and support staff interact effectively with the children and encourage them to extend and develop their ideas. It is important that the KS1

staff continue to evaluate the play programme; they have identified appropriately the need to extend the children's outdoor play activities, to indicate further the learning to be promoted in the play experiences and to refine the teachers' methods of assessing the children's learning and development.

2.14 The school has identified, through the appropriate use of diagnostic tests and teacher observation, 32 children who are in need of additional learning support in English and mathematics. There is regular and informative liaison between the class teachers and the special educational needs co-ordinator, in the compilation of the education plans and in the monitoring of the children's progress. There is, however, some variation in the quality of the plans: the specific remediation strategies need to be more sharply and consistently defined. The children's special educational needs are addressed appropriately within the context of the classroom. Most teachers use suitable materials, differentiated practical activities and discussion to support the children who have difficulty with aspects of their learning. In addition, the school allocates significant resources to the provision of a Reading Recovery programme for children with specific learning needs in English. The two teachers responsible for the programme plan effectively for the sessions and provide a high quality of support for the children. There is clear evidence that the children make good progress. Furthermore, during the inspection, it was evident that the children's reading and writing skills benefit significantly from the successful implementation of the Reading Recovery strategies throughout all the KS1 classes.

2.15 The school measures the progress of the children's learning through a series of class tests, standardised tests and end of key stage assessments. Increasingly the teachers, supported by the subject co-ordinators, are analysing the performance data to monitor individual progress and to help the children set targets for improvement. The school recognises the need to ensure that this work is implemented consistently and that the outcomes are used effectively to inform future planning, learning and teaching. It is appropriate that this area is currently under review. The teachers provide the children with good oral feedback on their work during lessons. Class work is marked regularly; the teachers provide written comments that in the best practice helps the children to improve the quality of their work. The parents have regular opportunities to discuss their child's progress; written reports are sent home at the end of the year. The school has identified the need to change the format of these reports to reflect more appropriately the knowledge, skills and understanding that the children have developed.

2.16 The Principal is dedicated, hard-working and fully committed to the development of the life and work of the school. She has been in post for four years and fosters a team approach to ongoing school development; she is ably supported by the Vice-principal. The Principal demonstrates a strong commitment to the children's pastoral care and to curriculum improvement through an effective self-evaluation process.

2.17 The staff are deployed in ways which make good use of their experience and expertise. The teachers have benefited well from staff development sessions which are related to the appropriate priorities identified in the school development plan. The Principal uses staff directed time well and school-based in-service training sessions are focused on supporting current curricular developments.

3. CONCLUSION

3.1 The strengths of the school include:

- the effective leadership of the Principal;
- the high quality of the pastoral care arrangements;
- the well-motivated children whose behaviour is excellent;
- the strong support of the parents, the local community and the BoG;
- the hard-working and committed staff ;
- the quality of the teaching;
- the wide range of extra-curricular provision;
- the school's commitment to health promotion;
- the good range of the children's learning experiences in English; and
- the good standards achieved by the majority of the children in English.

3.2 The area for improvement includes the need to:

- develop further the monitoring and evaluation strategies to track individual children's progress and set targets for further improvement.

3.3 In the areas inspected, the school has important strengths in most aspects of its educational and pastoral provision. The inspection has identified minor areas for improvement which the school has the capacity to address.

The school's progress on the area for improvement will be monitored by the District Inspector.

4. THE NURSERY UNIT

4.1 The nursery unit is situated in purpose-built accommodation within the grounds of St Joseph's Primary School, Dunloy. The staff moved into the new premises two years ago.

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

4.3 The nursery unit implements appropriate procedures for child protection that comply with the relevant Department of Education Circulars, to safeguard the welfare of the children. The policy is shared with the parents.

4.4 The nursery unit demonstrates a strong commitment to promoting a healthy lifestyle among the children. Very good opportunities are provided for the children to participate in a wide range of energetic physical activities.

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

- The very positive ethos creates a stimulating and welcoming environment for learning. The playroom is thoughtfully arranged with distinct areas for aspects of play. The staff provide an interesting range of natural materials and items of interest for the children to observe and investigate both indoors and outdoors. The working relationships at all levels are excellent.
- The staff are skilful at naturally promoting language and learning through the play activities and group sessions. They ask appropriate questions, extend the children's ideas and thinking and match their support to the children's abilities very effectively.
- There are good opportunities for learning across the six areas of the pre-school curriculum. The children are well motivated and show a good level of involvement in the activities. Their language is developed effectively through skilful story-telling sessions. They join in enthusiastically with rhymes and songs.
- Excellent use is made of seasonal and environmental topics, which extend the children's knowledge of, and interest in, the world around them. There are very good opportunities for the children to explore materials, observe changes and form ideas about how things work both indoors and outdoors. There are good opportunities for the children to design and build using a variety of constructional materials.
- The staff plan together and have a good understanding of the learning to be promoted through the play activities. They observe and evaluate the quality of the children's play and are compiling attractive and detailed individual profiles of the children's achievements. Throughout the year the staff share regularly the information on the children's progress.

- There is excellent communication with the parents. A variety of opportunities is provided to encourage the parents to become involved in the children's learning. There are excellent professional links with the local primary school.
- The teacher-in-charge of the nursery unit provides highly effective leadership. She is ably supported by the nursery assistant. There is a very strong sense of team-work and enjoyment among the hard-working and dedicated staff.
- The quality of the accommodation is excellent. The purpose-built premises are well matched to the needs of the young children. The space is used imaginatively to provide the children with a wide range of experiences. The outdoor area has been thoughtfully designed to provide a good variety of learning opportunities for physical play and for exploring the natural environment.

4.6 The staff's use of the Education and Training Inspectorate's document, 'Together Towards Improvement', has provided a good starting point for self-evaluation. They have identified an appropriate area for development, have reflected constructively on their practice, and have collaborated as a team to introduce and monitor new approaches. There is good evidence that their efforts have improved the children's learning experiences. The nursery unit's development plan is comprehensive and identifies suitable targets for improvement.

4.7 The nursery unit has major strengths in its educational and pastoral provision. The educational and pastoral needs of the children are being 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 THE NURSERY UNIT IN ST JOSEPH'S PRIMARY SCHOOL

1. Details of Children

Number of children:	Class 1	Class 2
Attending full-time	0	0
Attending part-time	26	26
Under 3 years of age*	0	16
With statement of SEN**	0	0
At CoP stages 3 or 4***	0	0
At CoP stages 1 or 2***	0	0
With English as an additional language	0	0

* 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.	0
Average attendance for the previous year.	85.5%

2. Duration of Sessions

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

3. Details of Staff

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

Number of: ****	
Trainees	1

**** Total placements since September of current year

4. Parental Questionnaires

Number issued	52
Percentage returned	65.4%
Number of written comments	7

ACCOMMODATION (PRIMARY SCHOOL)

- The inadequate size of the early years classrooms.

HEALTH AND SAFETY (PRIMARY SCHOOL)

- The need to carry out a risk assessment of the surface under the climbing frame in the school playground.
- The lack of appropriate car parking facilities at the school leads to severe traffic congestion in the morning and afternoon.

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