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## **Education and Training Inspectorate**

### **Report of a Focused Inspection**

**St Joseph's Primary School  
Caledon**

**Inspected: November 2007**

## CONTENTS

<b>Section</b>		<b>Page</b>
	STATISTICAL INFORMATION	
1.	INTRODUCTION	1
2.	THE QUALITY OF THE CHILDREN'S WORK	1
3.	MANAGEMENT ARRANGEMENTS	5
4.	CONCLUSION	5



## **1. INTRODUCTION**

1.1 St Joseph's Primary School is a rural school situated on the outskirts of the village of Caledon, Co Tyrone. Almost all of the children come from the local area. The enrolment has declined over the past five years to its current level of 34. Approximately 12% 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 and teachers to complete a confidential questionnaire prior to the inspection, as well as meetings with representatives from the Board of Governors (governors) and a group of children from key stage (KS) 2. Twenty-two families were issued with questionnaires; approximately 73% were returned to the Department of Education (DE), of which eight contained additional written comments. The responses from the parental questionnaires highlighted the helpful and caring staff, the excellent leadership provided by the Principal and the happy and pleasant environment for learning and teaching. All of the teachers completed an online questionnaire and provided additional written comments; their responses were wholly positive. The governors commented favourably on the hard-working and dedicated staff, the leadership provided by the Principal and particularly the high regard with which the school is held in the community. The children spoke very positively about their enjoyment of school, the help given by their teachers and the different activities provided to promote their health and well-being. The few issues raised by some parents have been discussed with the Principal and the governors.

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

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

2.1 A very caring and supportive ethos permeates throughout the school. The children are friendly and welcoming to visitors and a strong sense of community is evident; the overall standard of behaviour both in and out of class is excellent. The children report that they enjoy school; they show motivation and enjoyment in their learning and are keen to talk about their work. The learning environment is bright and stimulating; examples of the children's art, written and topic work, photographs and evidence of their achievements are displayed and celebrated in the main entrance foyer, corridors and classrooms. The quality of the classroom displays is of a very high standard. Working relationships at all levels throughout the school are excellent.

2.2 A wide range of strategies, including awards such as 'star awards', 'golden time' and certificates of achievement, help promote the children's self-esteem and confidence. The reward system has a positive impact on the children's motivation and standards of work and behaviour in class. The establishment of a school council provides the children with an opportunity to contribute to the development of procedures and practices in school. Independence is promoted through the delegation of suitable responsibilities to the children. A 'reading buddy' system is well-established between children in KS1 and KS2; this helps to develop interpersonal skills and personal responsibility.

2.3 The children participate in a range of activities including sport drama, dance, music and art. Sports activities include, Gaelic football, hurling, camogie, cycling and swimming. The children take part in competitions, quizzes, tournaments, cross-border and cross-community programmes and participate in fund-raising activities for the school and for various charities. Close cross-community links have been formed with a local controlled primary school; the children and staff from both schools work together on joint curricular projects involving, art, music, and environmental issues. These experiences, which include a programme of school visits to places of educational interest, increase the children's awareness and understanding of the local and wider community.

2.4 Parents are kept well-informed about the life and work of the school through frequent meetings and a monthly newsletter. They are informed regularly about their children's progress and have opportunities to learn how they might help them. The school has, for example, provided opportunities for parents to enhance their own ICT skills through the provision of ICT classes within the school, facilitated by a local Further Education College, and through regular information mornings. The views of the parents are sought systematically and taken into account when the school reviews its curriculum, and pastoral provision, for example, by way of parental questionnaires. A very active Parent Teachers Association provides strong support for the school; various events are organised and significant amounts of money are raised to purchase additional teaching resources.

2.5 The quality of the arrangements for pastoral care and child protection in the school is very good. The school has procedures in place which fully implement the guidance outlined in the relevant DE Circulars. The governors, staff, parents and pupils are fully aware of the school's procedures and have had an opportunity to contribute to a range of effective policies which guide the work of the school. Among the strengths are the strong and effective leadership of the designated and deputy designated teachers who take responsibility for the good quality of the curricular provision for pastoral care, the extensive consultation with parents and children on various issues relating to pastoral care, the highly effective reward system and the use of external agencies to further develop the pastoral needs of the children and staff.

2.6 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, 'Boost Better Breaks', the provision of fruit and milk for all children at break, the use of outside agencies for the promotion of physical activity, the investment in a range of play equipment and physical resources, the use of the expertise of staff in the 'Heartstart' programme, and the effective curricular links which encourage the children to adopt a healthy lifestyle.

2.7 The planning for English is broad and balanced and is well-matched to the priorities set out in the School Development Plan (SDP). The diligent preparation of schemes of work and topics to meet the needs of the children is effectively supporting progression in their learning. The short-term planning for lessons identifies clearly the intended learning outcomes and is used effectively to guide the teachers in their day-to-day work with the children. With the small numbers in each year group, there are significant challenges in planning for individual year groups; however, the teachers work hard to ensure that the children's all round development is considered.

2.8 Each teacher has a composite class that includes three or four year groups and, in addition, is responsible for the work of a whole KS. This places considerable demands on them in terms of planning, monitoring and evaluation of the work across a number of different year groups. The teachers are extremely hard-working and conscientious and have high expectations of what the children can achieve. The lessons are well-organised, stimulating and enjoyable. The quality of the teaching observed during the inspection was always very good. The teachers make explicit the learning intentions, take account of the varying abilities and interests within the class, and employ effective teaching strategies including the use of individual, paired and group work. Through skilful questioning, the teachers build on the children's responses to extend their oral work and provide opportunities for them to reflect on their learning. Information and communication technology is used very effectively to support the lessons and to motivate the children to learn.

2.9 A vibrant literacy environment is evident across the school. The teachers have created stimulating library areas within their classrooms which contain suitable ranges of fiction and non-fiction books and collections of the children's own work. These are supplemented with other resources such as word walls, vocabulary lists, and the children have access to dictionaries and thesauri to help them with their general language development work. The school regularly arranges literacy-based events to further encourage a positive attitude to books and reading.

2.10 The encouraging and caring tone throughout the school helps promote the development of the children's talking and listening skills and their language across the curriculum. In KS1, the children are encouraged to talk about their interests and experiences, and to retell stories they hear in class. They are encouraged to use new language and vocabulary correctly, and are given opportunities to apply what they have learned in different contexts. As they progress, the children engage in group topic work and class discussions and become increasingly confident and articulate. Throughout KS2, strategies such as Circle Time, role-play and critiquing pieces of work provide the children with opportunities to express their opinions and explain the learning that has taken place; these are valued both by their teacher and their peers. Participation at the local Feis, and in school productions enhances further their oral skills and confidence. The children's talking and listening skills are well-developed; they are linked effectively to their reading and writing activities and promoted and used in other areas of the curriculum.

2.11 The children's reading skills are developed systematically across the school. In KS1, the children are introduced to a variety of reading resources and they develop an early interest in stories and books. Children are made familiar with a range of print from a variety of sources including core reading books, Big Books, fiction and non-fiction texts. The children build up a strong understanding of sounds and letters through a structured and consistent phonic approach. Further reading strategies are developed to provide the children with a range of word recognition skills. Due emphasis is placed on the importance of engaging with the text and developing understanding at all levels. Effective remedial strategies including the Reading Partnership programme are in place to provide help for children in need of additional support with their reading. By the end of KS1 the majority of the children read independently, with increasing accuracy and good understanding. In KS2, the children's reading skills are promoted further; an extensive range of texts including class novels, reference books and information accessed from computers is used effectively to develop the children's fluency, expression and comprehension. Much of this work is connected to the children's writing and oracy, and is linked effectively to curricular themes such as healthy

living. By the end of KS2, the children achieve standards well in line with, or above their level of ability.

2.12 The development of writing is well-integrated with other aspects of literacy and developed progressively throughout the school. As they move through KS1, the children become increasingly competent and prepare short pieces of personal writing that are neat and grammatically correct. Throughout KS2, the children are given opportunities to write in a variety of genre for a range of audiences. Much of this work supports learning in other curricular areas and includes letter writing, book reviews, instructional and creative writing and poetry; good examples of the children's writing are prominently displayed as a teaching resource in the classroom libraries. The children's development of their writing has been enriched through the provision of opportunities to meet with a local author and discuss creative writing. They also have opportunities to use art work (on loan from the Arts Council) as a stimulus for their creative writing and other curricular areas and through a joint digital media project with a local primary school, sponsored by the Armagh Multi-media Access centre. Effective use is made of ICT to support the children's learning. By the end of KS2, most of the children achieve a very good standard in their work and can write in a range of contexts and styles.

2.13 Throughout the school the use of ICT is well-integrated into classroom practice. The children compose and edit on screen and manipulate text and graphics. Good use is made of the digital camera to stimulate writing in response to trips and school events and to record work completed by the children. In KS2 the Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment KS2 Accreditation Scheme is used effectively to broaden the children's ICT skill and experiences.

2.14 At foundation stage, the teachers have created an attractive and stimulating learning environment that takes account of the children's needs and interests. Flexible timetabling within the composite class provides opportunities for the children to avail of play based learning. There is a relaxed atmosphere in the classroom and the shared play areas are presented attractively with colourful displays and samples of children's work. The children experience a range of well-planned and suitably resourced play activities that develop their creativity and investigative skills and support their language development across the curriculum. Routines are well-established and provide opportunities for the promotion of independence. The teachers and support staff ask suitable questions and encourage the children to express their ideas and views. The school recognises the need to develop further a consistent approach to observing and recording each child's progress in learning, in order to inform future planning and provision. Consideration has already been given to the provision of outdoor play and this should be further developed.

2.15 The school has identified approximately one-fifth of the children requiring additional support with aspects of their learning. A comprehensive policy guides the special needs programme, including the provision of well-focused staff development sessions. The children's learning needs are identified at an early stage through classroom observations and the use of screening procedures and diagnostic tests. The Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator (SENCO) works effectively and collaboratively to provide effective and supportive help to those children who experience difficulty with aspects of their learning. Useful education plans (EPs) are maintained and identify relevant strategies and targets for improvement. Much of the support is provided within the class setting; when required, the school makes good use of external agencies to support the children and the teachers.

2.16 The school has a useful assessment policy in place which is implemented effectively. Results from standardised tests are used well to track the children's progress as they move through the school; this information and the professional judgement of the teachers is used appropriately to inform future planning, to promote improvement and to target additional support where required. The teachers mark the children's written work conscientiously and with rigour; the quality of the marking is outstanding, with appropriate feedback commending effort and providing suggestions on how the work might be improved. The parents have regular opportunities to meet with the teachers to discuss their children's progress, and written reports detailing each child's achievements are sent home annually.

### **3. MANAGEMENT ARRANGEMENTS**

3.1 The Principal, who has been in post for five years, provides excellent leadership. She combines effectively teaching, leadership and management roles as well as taking a personal interest in the progress and development of individual children. She sets high expectations, inspires confidence and has a clear vision for the school which she communicates well to staff, parents, governors and the local community. She sets a positive tone throughout the school and her consultative and inclusive approach to school development work promotes a strong sense of collegiality amongst the staff; in this work she is very ably supported by the assistant teacher and the governors.

3.2 The schools improvement process is clearly linked to an agreed SDP. The school has identified appropriate targets for improvement including aspects of literacy and ICT and has consulted widely with parents, teachers and the children on a variety of school improvement matters. Effective policies are in place to guide and inform the work of the teachers and parents. The school's targets are clearly defined and related to staff development opportunities. The school gives very good attention to, and meets, the requirements of the School Development Plans Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2005.

3.3 The Principal avails infrequently of the principal release days and the funding made available is used to support the overall school budget. This adds very significantly to her workload, her teaching commitment and her administrative duties. In addition the teachers and support staff give freely of their time to ensure that the children benefit beyond the school day to enrich their learning experiences.

3.4 The accommodation is maintained well and the standard of caretaking is good. The classroom assistants, kitchen staff, and school secretary make a valuable contribution to the work of the school.

### **4. CONCLUSION**

4.1 The strengths of the school are:

- the caring and supportive ethos and the very good quality of the arrangements for pastoral care;
- the excellent leadership provided by the Principal and the support given by the assistant teacher and governors;



- the excellent behaviour and the positive attitude of the children to their learning;
- the quality of the teaching that was always very good;
- the overall good standards of attainment in English; and
- the excellent links with the community and external agencies to support and enhance the children's experiences.

4.2 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 and local community can have confidence in the school's capacity for sustained self-improvement.

No follow-up inspection is required.

4.3 It will be important that the employing authority, the school governors and the staff plan for, and manage, issues relating to the sustainability of the schools provision and the school budget, in order to address the current and future needs of the children and staff.

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