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## **Education and Training Inspectorate**

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

**St Malachy's Primary School and Nursery Unit  
Belfast**

**Inspected: May 2008**

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## **1. INTRODUCTION**

1.1 St Malachy's Primary School is situated in Eliza Street in the Markets area of East Belfast. Almost all of the children come from the immediate area and walk to school. In common with nearly all of the primary schools in the area the enrolment has fallen over the past number of years to its current level of 213. Approximately 50% of the children are entitled to free school meals. The school has identified 40% of the children as requiring additional support with aspects of their learning

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 year 6. One hundred and six questionnaires were issued to parents; 57% were returned to the Department of Education (DE) of which 24 contained additional written comments. The responses from the parental questionnaire indicate strongly that the parents support and value the work of the school. In particular, they highlighted the safe, caring and welcoming ethos, the hard work and approachability of the staff and their confidence in the school's capacity to deal with any concerns and to meet the needs of individual children.

1.3 All of the teaching staff responded to the online questionnaire; seven included additional written comments. The responses were wholly supportive of the work of the school. In particular, the teachers mentioned the strong sense of community, the positive atmosphere and working relationships at all levels, the effective leadership and their enjoyment of working in the school.

1.4 The governors expressed their strong support for the school; they mentioned the high standing of the school in the local community, the positive ethos within the school, the dedication of the staff and the effective leadership and commitment shown by the Principal.

1.5 A meeting was also held with a group of year 6 children. They talked about the many aspects of school life that they enjoy and stated that they are aware of what to do if they have any concerns about their safety and well-being.

1.6 The very few areas of concern emerging from the parental questionnaires were discussed with the Principal and representatives of the governors.

1.7 The inspection focused on the quality of the work in mathematics, including the use of information and communication technology (ICT) in supporting numeracy and the effectiveness of the school's 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 is characterised by a strong sense of community and by a very caring, supportive and inclusive ethos. The children are friendly and courteous, they show respect for their teachers and their peers, and take pride in their work and in their school. The overall standard of behaviour both in and out of class is excellent. The school provides a stimulating

learning environment and makes innovative use of the outside space, including an eco-garden to enhance the children's learning experiences and to promote their appreciation of and respect for the environment.

2.2 There is good team spirit and a common sense of purpose among all of the staff. The teachers are hard-working, create an orderly atmosphere and are committed to the care and welfare of the children. The support staff are deployed effectively and make a valuable contribution to the life and work of the school. The school is well maintained to high standards of cleanliness.

2.3 Parents are kept well-informed about the life and work of the school through regular newsletters. Information on individual children's progress is provided through the annual written report, curriculum information sessions and by meetings with the class teacher during the year. Parents are encouraged to play an increasing role in the education of their children and, in order to promote this, the school has organised appropriate courses for parents following consultation.

2.4 The school has developed important links with the community and has initiated a series of useful programmes within the local area. There is a strong commitment in the school to establish new and strengthen existing links for the benefit of the children and the local community.

2.5 The quality of the arrangements for pastoral care and child protection in the school is excellent. The school has procedures in place which implement fully the guidance outlined in the relevant DE Circulars. The governors, staff, parents and children are fully aware of the school's procedures and have had the opportunity to contribute to a range of effective policies which guide the work of the school. Among the strengths are:

- the excellent working relationships throughout the school;
- the procedures in place to encourage positive behaviour;
- the strategies to promote the children's confidence and self-esteem; and
- the excellent work and support provided by key pastoral 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 to reinforce nutritional messages, which encourage the children to adopt healthy lifestyles.

2.7 The quality of the teaching observed during the inspection was always good, and, in a minority of the lessons, excellent. The most effective teaching observed was characterised by the use of a variety of teaching approaches including practical activities, paired and group work and opportunities for the children to discuss and explain their learning; the tasks were suitably differentiated, well paced and required the children to work independently and to make decisions about their learning. In addition, resources were used effectively to stimulate and support learning.

2.8 The teachers plan thoroughly for their teaching. The planning identifies clearly the intended learning outcomes and is used effectively to guide the teachers in their day-to-day work with the children. The teachers monitor the effectiveness of their teaching and are focussing on using their evaluations to inform future planning.

2.9 The children's mathematical learning is developed systematically across the school. A detailed scheme of work sets out an appropriate programme for each class, and the teachers' planning for mathematics identifies suitably age and ability-related learning outcomes for the attainment targets of number, measures, handling data and shape and space. Within this planning, mental mathematics and aspects of the processes attainment target are integrated effectively. The school's work in mathematics is co-ordinated well; the children's learning is monitored regularly, including the analysis of standardised performance data, and there is frequent evaluation of the use and effectiveness of resources, particularly those related to ICT. In addition, action plans are drawn up annually and focus on improving important aspects of provision; areas under review include the further development of individual and class target setting and on-going training for teachers in the use of the recently installed inter-active white boards to support their mathematics teaching.

2.10 In the foundation stage (FS), the children develop an understanding of number and simple shapes through a range of practical and oral activities, including sessions of activity-based learning and the good use of structured materials. In the sessions observed in the FS, the teachers helped to promote the children's mathematical language and understanding through skilful questioning and by making good connections to the children's own experiences. As they progress through key stage (KS) 1, the children's understanding is developed progressively and, by year 4, they are able to record numbers, perform basic calculations, recognise common two-dimensional and three-dimensional shapes, present and interpret simple data and measure in basic units. Learning is developed further throughout KS2 and, by year 7, most of children are attaining standards in line with, or better than, their ability; they have a good understanding of place value, can calculate and measure in a variety of ways, are aware of the properties of a range of shapes, and collect, present and analyse data in a variety of forms. Throughout the school, learning is consolidated effectively through regular sessions of mental mathematics. In many of the lessons observed, the children demonstrated good flexibility in their reasoning and were able to employ a range of strategies to work out their answers and to explain their thinking.

2.11 During the inspection, the children in some classes were given opportunities to apply their learning to work in other subject areas or to engage in investigative and problem solving activities. In year 4, for example, the children worked at a handling data activity linked to a science topic on healthy eating, while in year 7, the children applied their knowledge of area and perimeter to a measuring investigation within the school's gardens.

2.12 In all classes, a range of ICT applications, including inter-active whiteboards, programmable devices, database packages and general consolidation software, is used effectively to enhance the children's overall mathematical understanding.

2.13 The provision for SEN is a strong feature of the work of the school. The school has identified 40% of the children as requiring additional support with aspects of their learning. Support for literacy is provided through regular sessions of group withdrawal with the Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator (SENCO) and the special needs teacher. A small number of children with emotional or behavioural difficulties receive support through

outreach programmes. Liaison between the SENCO, the special needs teacher and the class teachers is well-planned and effective. The SENCO makes good use of the expertise of the class teachers, and employs a wide range of standardised and diagnostic tests to identify those children who enter the SEN programme. Individual education plans identify appropriate strategies and targets for improvement.

2.14 There is a clear commitment to the continuous development of the provision for SEN to meet the needs of the children through the effective use of monitoring and evaluation strategies to promote improvement. The children's needs are met in a caring and supportive environment. The SENCO maintains detailed and appropriate records of the work completed and of the progress made by individual children; there is evidence that the children are gaining from this provision.

2.15 The teachers mark the children's written work conscientiously, often adding supportive and encouraging comments. In the best practice the teachers' written comments provide helpful suggestions on how the work might be improved.

## MANAGEMENT ARRANGEMENTS

2.16 The Principal has been in post for 19 years and provides excellent leadership. He is highly committed to the welfare of the children and staff, sets high standards and expectations and ensures that the vision for the school is shared and understood by the children, staff, governors, parents and the local community. Roles and responsibilities within the school are clearly defined and the Principal's positive, consultative and collaborative tone motivates the staff and enables them to carry out their duties to a high standard. He is very ably supported by the Vice-principal who manages effectively a number of important pastoral and curricular areas.

2.17 The arrangements for self-evaluation are comprehensive, rigorous and effective in identifying the school's strengths and areas for ongoing development, particularly in matters relating to learning and teaching. The clear lines of communication between the senior management team and staff ensure that the process of self-evaluation is agreed and understood by all. The improvement process is clearly linked to the well-constructed school development plan which meets fully the requirements of the School Development Plans Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2005.

## 3. CONCLUSION

3.1 The strengths of the school include:

- the excellent quality of pastoral care which nurtures the children's confidence and self-esteem, and promotes mutual respect;
- the quality of the teaching observed which was always good, and, in a minority of the lessons, excellent;
- the overall standards attained by the children in mathematics;
- the high quality of the provision for SEN;

- the dedication and commitment of the staff and governors to the children, the school and the community; and
- the excellent leadership and vision of the Principal.

3.2 In the areas inspected, the quality of education provided in this school is excellent. The educational and pastoral needs of the learners are being very 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. THE NURSERY UNIT

4.1 The nursery unit (NU) is a purpose-built double unit situated a short distance from the primary school building. The children come from the surrounding area. Around 58% of children are in their penultimate pre-school year.

4.2 The parents and staff were given opportunities to express their views about the NU provision through the inspection questionnaires. The responses have been taken into account as part of the inspection. Almost all of the parents who responded indicated a high level of satisfaction with the provision. All of the staff responded to the staff questionnaire and indicated good levels of satisfaction with the centre. The responses have been shared with the Principal and Board of Governors.

4.3 The quality of the arrangements for pastoral care and child protection are very good. The NU has appropriate policies and procedures for child protection that comply with Department of Education Circulars and guidance. The inspection evidence indicates that these policies and procedures are implemented effectively and consistently to safeguard the children.

4.4 The NU gives very good attention to promoting health and well-being, including opportunities for healthy eating and physical activity and has effective policies and programmes in place which encourage the children to adopt healthy lifestyles.

4.5 The main strengths of the NU's educational and pastoral provision are as follows:

- the NU has a friendly and welcoming atmosphere. The environment is bright and stimulating with displays of the children's individual work and photographs. There are areas of interest which arouse the children's natural curiosity and imagination;
- there is a positive culture of inclusion and respect for diversity which is nurtured through imaginative activities for all the children. The arrangements for children and parents with English as an additional language are supportive and contribute effectively to the children's learning;
- the children are happy, well-behaved and co-operative. They display good social skills of turn taking and sharing and generally settle well to lengthy periods of concentrated and purposeful play;
- the hard-working and committed staff have availed of a wide range of appropriate opportunities for further professional development. The teachers are ably supported by the classroom assistants and there is a strong sense of team work. There are productive links with the primary school;
- the staff have established effective links with parents and there is a developing culture of consultation as part of ongoing self-evaluation. The NU plays an important role in the local community and appropriately involves and consults external agencies to support the individual needs of the children; and
- during the inspection many examples of very good staff interaction were observed when the adults promoted the children's language, thinking and learning. In the best

practice the staff used effective questioning which built on and extended the children's ideas. There were particular strengths in the development of early maths experiences and language and communication.

4.6 The inspection identified an area for improvement:

- the staff need to develop further the pre-school programme through the sharing of good practice in order to meet more fully the wide range of differing needs within the NU.

4.7 The NU co-ordinator is a very good role model and manages the NU effectively. A good start has been made to self-evaluation leading to improvement. There is a development plan for the NU which has identified appropriate areas for improvement. The staff have recently reviewed planning and are developing systematic evaluations.

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

The NU's progress on the areas for improvement will be monitored by the District Inspector.

**STATISTICAL INFORMATION ON ST MALACHY'S 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*	15	15
With statement of SEN**	1	0
At CoP stages 3 or 4***	0	0
At CoP stages 1 or 2***	0	1
With English as an additional language	8	7

\* 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.	3%
Average attendance for the previous year.	88.5%

**2. Duration of Sessions**

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

**3. Details of Staff**

<b>Number of:</b>	<b>Full-Time</b>	<b>Part-Time</b>
Teachers	2	0
Nursery Assistants	2	1
Qualified Nursery Assistants	2	0

<b>Number of: ****</b>	
Students	2
Trainees	0

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

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

Number issued	50
Percentage returned	22%
Number of written comments	1

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