



*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 Malachy's Primary School
Newry**

Inspected: March 2007

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BASIC INFORMATION SHEET (BIS) - PRIMARY SCHOOLS

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|----|-----|--|------|---|
| A. | i. | School: St Malachy's Primary School | iii. | Date of Inspection: W/B 26.3.07 |
| | ii. | School Reference Number: 5036433 | iv. | Nature of Inspection: Focused English, SEN & ICT |

B.

School Year	2002/03	2003/04	2004/05	2005/06	2006/07
Year 1 Intake	60	50	52	37	36
Enrolments					
Primary	422	392	383	354	323
Reception	0	0	0	0	0
Nursery Class/Classes	0	0	0	0	0
Special Unit	14	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): 91.9%

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) | 15 | - | - |
| | ii. | PTR (Pupil/Teacher Ratio): | 21.5 | NI PTR: | 20.5 |
| | iii. | Average Class Size: | 23 | | |
| | iv. | Class Size (Range): | 17 to 29 | | |
| | v. | Ancillary Support:
Number of Hours Per Week : | | | |
| | | i. Clerical support: | | 36 | |
| | | ii. Official Making A Good
Start Support: | | 25 | |
| | | iii. Additional hours of other
classroom assistant support: | | 147 | |
| | vi. | Number of children with statements of special educational needs: | | 19 | |
| | vii. | Number of children who are not of statutory school age: | | 0 | |
| | viii. | Percentage of children entitled to free school meals: | | 50.2 | |

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 St Malachy's Primary School is situated on an attractive elevated site on the western outskirts of Newry. The children come from the city and the surrounding rural area. The enrolment has shown a marked decline over recent years and currently stands at 323. Just over 50% 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 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. Of the 132 questionnaires issued to the parents, 33% were returned to the Department of Education (DE) of which 24 contained additional written comments. The written responses from the parents indicated that they appreciate the supportive teachers and the caring environment within the school; a significant number of the parents voiced concerns about the effectiveness of the management of the school. The governors expressed their appreciation of the very recent work of the seconded Acting principal and of the staff; they also raised some concerns, including the lack of progress in the process of Professional Review and Staff Development (PRSD).

1.3 The year 6 children talked enthusiastically about their friends and the good working relationships between the children and adults within the school; from these discussions there is clear evidence that they are aware of what to do if they have any concerns about their care and wellbeing. The Education and Training Inspectorate has reported to the Acting-principal and a representative of the governors about the main issues emerging from the questionnaires and the discussions. Where appropriate, issues raised are dealt with in the main body of the report.

1.4 The school's programme for the promotion of health and well-being has many strengths. It has appropriate policies and programmes in place, such as 'Boost Better Breaks', water provision, theme days and a Key Stage (KS) 1 after-school cookery club, all of which encourage the children to adopt healthy lifestyles. An assessment of the nature and quality of the arrangements for health and wellbeing practices within the school should be included in the School Development Plan (SDP) to comply with statutory regulations. There is evidence of a commitment on the part of the staff to promote healthy eating through, for example, awarding merits to children who choose fruit and vegetables as part of their school dinner, a fruit promotion day and within information letters to parents. The children demonstrate a good understanding of the importance of making healthy life choices. There are opportunities for all children to participate in a range of physical activities both during and after school.

1.5 The inspection focused on the work in English, information and communication technology (ICT) and pastoral care, including the school's arrangements for child protection, health and wellbeing.

2. THE QUALITY OF THE CHILDREN'S WORK

2.1 There are many strengths in the quality of the arrangements for pastoral care and child protection. The school has procedures in place which implement the guidance outlined in the DE Circulars and has identified appropriately a few minor areas for improvement which it is currently implementing. Among the strengths are the caring ethos throughout the school and

the celebration of children's achievements. The few minor areas for improvement identified included the need to consult further with the children and parents when revising policies, update and review the training for the governors and ensure that all parents are fully aware of the child protection and other related policies.

2.2 The teachers have established a happy, supportive and caring atmosphere based on mutual respect between the children and adults. The staff know the children well. Good routines are well-established throughout the school and there is an impressive sense of order. The children are courteous and well behaved. Children who have joined the school from other countries are integrated fully and their culture is celebrated. A great deal of attention is given to creating a bright and attractive learning environment, with examples of children's art, written and topic work, and evidence of their achievements displayed and celebrated throughout the school.

2.3 The children's personal development is enhanced through their participation in a variety of extra-curricular activities including sports and music. The children are aware of the needs of others and raise significant funds for charity. The school is committed to developing the children's awareness and appreciation of other cultures, for example, through a Comenius Project and in providing children who have come from other countries, the opportunity to share their experiences and backgrounds.

2.4 Curriculum planning is generally comprehensive; there is a range of helpful policies including yearly schemes, termly, half termly and weekly plans. The teachers work together in year groups to develop their lesson plans and this ensures a uniformity of approach. While much of the planning is over directed by content, the teachers are beginning to focus appropriately on intended learning outcomes for the children; this practice should be developed more consistently across the school. It is important that all teachers have, and articulate to the children, a clear understanding of the intended learning within lessons, and that opportunities are provided for the children to discuss their learning and build systematically upon it.

2.5 The quality of most of the teaching observed during the inspection ranged from satisfactory to good; a very small number of lessons observed were excellent, while a minority had significant weaknesses which outweighed strengths. In the most effective lessons, the intended learning was clear and shared with the children and revisited during the course of the activity; the children were provided with relevant and challenging tasks that were matched well to their needs and which promoted their thinking skills and developed their independence. Further, the teachers made very effective use of resources and asked good questions to extend the children's learning. In a number of classes, the support staff, guided by the teachers, provided valuable assistance to the children. Some lessons, however, lacked a clear focus, were poorly paced and provided insufficient challenge, variety and relevance to promote learning for all of the children; often, the standards being achieved were not high enough. In addition, while there is some use of ICT, this area is underdeveloped in supporting learning and teaching. To ensure greater consistency in learning and teaching, the teachers should be regularly reviewing their teaching approaches and engaging in the process of disseminating, sharing and learning from the good practice which already exists; this will require well-focused discussion, debate and improved curriculum leadership; the staff report that they have identified this as a key area for improvement.

2.6 English is an ongoing area of development within the school. Over recent years, a revised format for planning has been implemented and new resources have been acquired. The planning identifies key learning outcomes and sets out the teaching approaches and resources to be used; while this provides helpful guidance for lessons, there is a need for more specific direction on the progressive development of important aspects of the children's learning, including, for example, phonic awareness and writing skills. The school's work in English is supported by an effective paired reading programme and by the 'Reading Partnership' initiative. The central library contains a good range of fiction and non-fiction texts, many of which support class topics.

2.7 In the early years classes, the children are encouraged to talk about their work and their interests, and to listen attentively to the contributions of others. Activities such as shared reading, structured play and the learning of songs and rhymes enhance the children's oral skills and help develop their confidence. As they progress through the school, sessions of circle time, and paired and group activities, provide increased opportunities for the children to express their views and opinions and to discuss their learning. In many instances, the children's oral skills are promoted further through skilful prompting and questioning from the class teacher. At their most effective, oral activities are linked effectively to other aspects of the children's work; in a year 7 class, for example, some children, as part of their study of the Famine, built upon their knowledge of emigrant voyages to describe vividly the conditions and the feelings of those travelling to America. In almost all classes, most of the children listen well, respond enthusiastically and are capable of confident and mature oral contributions.

2.8 The children's reading skills are developed systematically throughout KS1. From early in year 1, the children are acquainted with print and, through matching activities and shared reading activities, begin to build up a sight vocabulary of key words linked to a commercial reading scheme; at the same time, a phonic awareness is developed progressively. The children's understanding is built upon and by the end of year 4 most have developed good word attack skills and are able to read with accuracy and fluency at a level appropriate to their age. Due emphasis is placed on the understanding of text. In the best practice, well-chosen novels provide good opportunities for the children to discuss what they have read; in these instances there is a clear understanding of key features such as characters, setting and mood. This work is supported through the effective use of dictionaries. In KS2, the teaching of reading is, generally, less effective; often there is an over dependence on listening to children reading prepared texts or on the completion of textbook exercises which focus on testing comprehension rather than enhancing or developing the children's skills in reading. In the instances where practice was more effective, reading and writing activities were suitably connected and the work often supported learning in other curricular areas. It is important that emphasis is given to the ongoing development of reading skills, particularly, for the less able children; consideration should be given to providing them with more stimulating, age-related reading resources.

2.9 Writing skills are developed progressively across the school. In year 1 the children become familiar with different forms of print and experiment with informal mark making. Letter formation and word building skills are developed through shared writing activities, and a knowledge of basic conventions such as simple sentence structure is built up. As their skills develop, the children begin to record their ideas in sentence form and then in lengthier prose. Independent writing is promoted appropriately; in a year 2 class, for example, a group of more able children were able to sequence, in their own words, the main parts of a well

known fairy tale. By the end of KS1, most children can express their ideas accurately and neatly, with a length and quality of content appropriate to their ability. As they progress through KS2, the children expand their writing styles and have opportunities to write for a variety of purposes including descriptions, instructions, letters and poems. In the best practice, this writing is linked to other areas of the curriculum; too often, though, writing in subjects such as history and geography is restricted to the copying down of notes or by the completion of simple single word exercises; independent writing, particularly of a creative nature, needs to be promoted further. The use of ICT to support work in English is evident in some classes but is generally underdeveloped. It is appropriate that this aspect of work has been identified as an area of development within the school. The quality of the children's handwriting and general presentation of work varies. In some instances it is excellent, while in other classes it is not as good as it should be.

2.10 The proposal to establish a whole-school literacy team is timely and has the potential to contribute to greater consistency in learning and teaching across all of the classes. While there are procedures in place for monitoring and evaluating the provision in English, these should be developed further in order to assess more robustly the overall quality of learning and teaching and the standards attained by the children.

2.11 The school has identified approximately 23% of the children as being in need of additional learning support in English and mathematics; in addition, a small number of children have special needs in relation to aspects of their behaviour. The children in need of support are identified appropriately at an early stage through the effective combination of teacher observation, diagnostic tests and analysis of standardised test results. Since the last survey inspection of special educational needs (SEN), the special educational needs co-ordinator (SENCO) has made significant progress in the development of the provision for the children with learning difficulties. The classroom teachers compile useful education plans, in consultation with the SENCO, which set out specific learning objectives and teaching strategies for each child. These plans are reviewed regularly and adjusted appropriately.

2.12 In the majority of classes, helpful support is provided in class, through differentiated work, and activities prepared by the class teachers. A minority of class teachers need, however, to take greater cognisance of these plans in their own planning and teaching and to re-evaluate the extent to which the lesson content relates to the children's learning needs. A small number of children are withdrawn regularly for individual or group sessions of specific support, such as the "Reading Partnership" programme. There is evidence that the majority of the children who receive additional support make satisfactory progress in their reading. The school has good links with other professional agencies and these provide valued assistance to individual children.

2.13 There is, however, a need for the SENCO to have an appropriate time allocation in which to monitor systematically the children's learning experiences and attainments as they move through the key stages.

2.14 During the inspection, the play sessions observed provided useful opportunities for the children to consolidate important aspects of their learning, including mathematics and literacy. In the best practice, the teachers, through effective interaction and the imaginative use of resources, promoted effectively the children's language, thinking and confidence. The

children make choices, co-operate with one another, share ideas, role-play, and engage in extended spells of independent play. In developing further the provision for learning through play, it would be appropriate to devise a detailed scheme of work to help ensure progression in the children's learning throughout all of KS1.

2.15 There is a need to ensure that the children's work is marked and corrected in a more rigorous, regular and systematic manner. While much of the children's work is checked, there is little evidence of supportive, personalised comments which are both constructive and encouraging. In the poorest practice, the children's efforts are not properly corrected and untidy and unfinished class work is accepted by the teacher. The best marking identifies clearly strengths and areas for improvement in the children's work and these are followed up; this good practice should be a feature in all classrooms. The marking policy needs to be reviewed and implemented consistently across the school.

2.16 At the time of the inspection, the Acting principal, who had been seconded from a primary school in another area, had been in post for just three weeks. In a very short time, he has worked diligently and given very significant time to the pastoral needs of the children and staff.

2.17 It will be important in the light of the inspection findings that the staff are provided with effective curricular leadership and strategic management to guide their work. There is a need for rigour in the monitoring and evaluation of the out working of the school's policy on learning and teaching and of the children's attainments. Further, there is a urgent need to make more effective analysis and use of the school's quantitative internal and external data to inform planning and to set targets to address the needs of all of the children.

2.18 The SDP sets out lists of areas for improvement but fails to meet the requirements of the DE circulars on School Development Planning. There is a need to agree and implement a coherent SDP with a clear focus on learning and teaching and which takes full account of the findings of the inspection. Given the context within which the school operates, provision in SEN requires a higher profile. In addition, the SDP needs to include further detail on action planning, including a focus on specific target setting and performance indicators, in order to help the school monitor and evaluate more effectively the quality of learning and teaching and the standards attained by the children.

2.19 At the time of the inspection, the staff completed a self-evaluative questionnaire; their responses indicated that they have concerns about key areas in which improvement is urgently required. This example of auditing should, in the post-inspection phase, be sustained and extended as an effective way of working, and as a means for the school to become a self-reflective and evaluative organisation.

2.20 There is a need to ensure collegiate decision making, the building of curriculum teams and a greater consistency in the implementation of policies into practice. The governors and school staff will require external and well focused support on the areas for improvement from the Southern Education and Library Board and from the employing authority, the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools.

2.21 The quality of the accommodation is good; the school is presented and maintained attractively, and cleaned to a high standard.

3. **CONCLUSION**

3.1 Strengths of the school include:

- the quality of the arrangements for pastoral care and child protection;
- the happy, supportive and caring atmosphere based on mutual respect between the children and adults;
- the bright and attractive learning environment;
- the sound programme for the promotion of health and wellbeing;
- the satisfactory to good quality of most of the teaching and the instances of excellent practice;
- the willingness of the staff to work together to address areas for improvement;
- the range of extra-curricular activities which enriches the children's experiences;
- the commitment of the school to developing the children's awareness and appreciation of other cultures; and
- the support of the parents and the governors for the strong pastoral ethos of the school.

3.2 Areas for improvement include the need:

- to develop more effective curriculum and strategic management linked to staff development and school development planning;
- to ensure that the whole-school provision for English and ICT meet effectively and consistently the needs of all of the children
- to provide a sharper focus on monitoring the performance and standards achieved by the children from year to year, including the more effective use statistical information in order to set realistic targets for the school, and to influence and modify classroom practice. It will be important for the staff to develop, over time, an increased self-evaluative culture.

3.3 The governors, in partnership with the staff, needs to ensure that the provision across the school is consistent and effective. To this end, it is important that the governors monitor the SDP and the standards attained by the children. In addition, the governors need to oversee the full implementation of the school's PRSD programme.

3.4 In the areas inspected, the school has strengths in aspects of its educational and pastoral provision. The inspection has identified important areas for improvement, which need to be addressed promptly if the school is to meet more effectively the needs of all learners.

3.5 The Education and Training Inspectorate will monitor and report on the school's progress in addressing these areas for improvement.

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