



*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 Mary's Primary School  
Ballygawley**

**Inspected: March 2007**

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## BASIC INFORMATION SHEET (BIS) - PRIMARY SCHOOLS

- A. i. **School: St Mary's Primary Ballygawley**  
ii. **School Reference Number: 503-2735**
- iii. **Date of Inspection: W/B 19.03.07**  
iv. **Nature of Inspection: FI/English/SEN & ICT**

B.

<b>School Year</b>	<b>2002/03</b>	<b>2003/04</b>	<b>2004/05</b>	<b>2005/06</b>	<b>2006/07</b>
Year 1 Intake	15	15	11	15	14
<b>Enrolments</b>					
Primary	94	94	87	88	94
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): 96.79%

Primary & Reception	Nursery Unit	Special Unit
---------------------	--------------	--------------

- |    |       |   |   |         |      |
|----|-------|---|---|---------|------|
| D. | i.    | Number of Teachers<br>(including the principal and part-time teachers):<br>(Full-time equivalent = 25 teaching hours) | 4   | -       | -    |
|    | ii.   | PTR (Pupil/Teacher Ratio):  | 23.5  | NI PTR: | 20.5 |
|    | iii.  | Average Class Size:   | 23.5  |         |      |
|    | iv.   | Class Size (Range):   | 18 to 28  |         |      |
|    | v.    | Ancillary Support:  |   |         |      |
|    |       | Number of Hours <b>Per Week</b> :   |   |         |      |
|    |       | i.  | Clerical support:   |         | 8.5  |
|    |       | ii.   | Official Making A Good<br>Start Support:                  |         | 10   |
|    |       | iii.  | Additional hours of other<br>classroom assistant support: |         | 60   |
|    | vi.   | Number of children with statements of special educational needs:  |   |         | 5    |
|    | vii.  | Number of children who are not of statutory school age:   |   |         | 0    |
|    | viii. | Percentage of children entitled to free school meals:   |   |         | 13%  |

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

1.1 St Mary's Primary School is situated in the village of Ballygawley; the majority of the children come from the village and surrounding area. Whilst the enrolment of the school has fluctuated in recent years, projected figures indicate an upward trend. Approximately 13% of the children are entitled to receive free school meals.

1.2 The arrangements for the inspection of pastoral care and child protection included the completion of confidential questionnaires by the parents, a meeting with a group of the children in year 6 and with representatives from the Board of Governors (BoG). Sixty-one per cent of the questionnaires issued were returned to the Department of Education (DE); half of these contained additional written comments. The responses from the questionnaires indicated that the parents strongly support the work of the school. The BoG expressed their high regard for the quality of the education and the care provided for the children. The children reported that they feel happy and safe in the school.

1.3 The inspection focused on the quality of the work in English and the use of information and communication technology (ICT) in promoting and supporting learning and teaching in English, the provision for special educational needs, and on the school's arrangements for pastoral care, including child protection.

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

2.1 The school provides a happy, caring and supportive environment. The children are friendly, co-operative and interested in their learning; they displayed exemplary standards of behaviour during the inspection. Working relationships at all levels are excellent. The staff promote a calm, purposeful atmosphere, which develops effectively the children's confidence and self-esteem. Classrooms and corridors are used well to display aspects of school life and to celebrate the children's work and achievements. The quality of the displays is high with many serving as valuable learning and teaching resources.

2.2 The school gives consistently good attention to promoting health and well-being and has appropriate policies and programmes in place to encourage the children to adopt healthy lifestyles; for example, a healthy food and drink policy and unrestricted access to drinking water. There is strong commitment on the part of the staff to promoting healthy eating and to improving children's eating habits, for example, the Healthy Breaks policy. There are opportunities for all of the children to participate in a wide range of physical activities. The children demonstrate a very good understanding of the importance of making healthy life choices. It is appropriate that an assessment of the nature and quality of the arrangements for health and well-being practices within the school should now be included in the School Development Plan (SDP).

2.3 The children's experiences are enriched through, for example, a variety of music and sporting activities. In addition, their learning and social development are enhanced through regular visits to places of educational interest and visitors to the school. Strong links have been established with other primary schools in the area and the school takes part in the Cross Community Contact Programme.

2.4 The quality of pastoral care is very good; the Principal and the staff are committed to the children in their care. Concern for the children's safety and well-being, their learning, and their personal and social development pervades the life and work of the school. The staff have prepared a good range of policies to guide the pastoral provision in the school and the Principal ensures that the parents are informed about school policies and expectations. The staff have identified already, the need to review and update some of the procedures and guidance in order to ensure all the relevant DE Circulars in relation to child protection are implemented fully.

2.5 There are very good links with the parents and the local community. The parents are welcomed into the school and are encouraged to play an active and supporting role in the education of their children and in the life of the school. The school maintains regular and effective communication with the parents through, for example, the monthly newsletter which informs them about school events and arrangements that affect their children. The Parent Teacher Association has raised significant additional funds on behalf of the school. There are formal meetings for parents to meet with the teachers to discuss their children's progress and written reports are issued each year. Valuable links have been established with the local feeder pre-school settings and with the post primary schools to which the children transfer.

2.6 The teachers have developed a consistent approach to planning across the curriculum. The planning identifies clearly the intended learning; it is used effectively to guide the teachers in their day-to-day work with the children and is evaluated regularly to inform future learning. The activities planned for each year group are suitably differentiated to cater for the different abilities of the children.

2.7 All of the teachers have composite classes that include two year groups. The teachers are extremely hard-working and have realistically high expectations of what the children can achieve. Lessons are well organised, purposeful and enjoyable, with a good balance of direct teaching and opportunities for the children to work independently in pairs or in groups. During the inspection, the quality of teaching observed ranged from satisfactory to very good. In the best practice there was good differentiation in the work, the children were actively engaged in the learning tasks and the teachers' questioning was used skilfully to evaluate and extend the children's understanding and thinking. Purposeful activities were matched well to the range of the abilities of the children; there was appropriate challenge and pace in the work.

2.8 The children are well-motivated and display a positive attitude to their work. They respond with enthusiasm to the range of experiences offered; they co-operate well with one another and many show good levels of perseverance with the tasks that they are set.

2.9 The school promotes strongly all aspects of literacy with Talking and Listening a particular focus and priority in the current SDP. The staff have co-operated effectively to agree teaching strategies to literacy and to ensure that they adopt a consistent approach to their planning.

2.10 In almost all of the lessons observed across key stage (KS) 1 and KS2, the teachers provided good opportunities across the curriculum to encourage the children to listen and to respond orally. In general, the teachers use these opportunities effectively, in a range of contexts. The teachers are skilful in their prompts and questions; in the best practice,

sufficient time is given to encourage the children to make considered responses, to listen to, and build on, the contributions of others. Paired and group work activities enable the children to co-operate well and to be supportive of one another. The children's oral contributions in formal lessons and in Circle Time are valued; their oral confidence is increasing. In KS2, the children have begun to prepare presentations with the aid of computer software packages, often importing graphics and using images captured on digital camera.

2.11 The teachers plan systematically for the teaching of reading. In KS1 good use is made of Big Books, the core reading scheme and phonics to promote the children's engagement with text; the enjoyment of reading has a high priority in the school. The children are presented with a wide range of texts including fiction, non-fiction and poetry; these link effectively with curricular themes and topics such as healthy lifestyles. As they progress through the school the children become increasingly aware of the important features of books such as author, illustrator, title, cover, contents and summaries of the plot. During the inspection, members of the inspection team listened to some of the KS1 and KS2 children reading; the children read competently and confidently commented on the texts they were reading or favourite books that they had read. In addition, the children access information from websites and CD Roms. Each of the classrooms contain a well-stocked class library; however, the school should review the location of its central library area to ensure that it provides the most effective access for all of the children. The school monitors regularly and systematically the standards of reading. Overall, these are sound and improving. Where teachers identify a need to review or modify the current reading programme to address particular needs of the children, they consult with the special education needs co-ordinator (SENCO) and the Reading Recovery Teacher.

2.12 The development of children's writing is well integrated with the other aspects of the English curriculum. Particular attention is paid to the importance of presentation of written work. The teachers acknowledge fully the place of ICT to support their teaching and to enhance the children's learning in English. They are increasingly enthusiastic about incorporating the use of ICT to support and stimulate effectively the children's interest in both reading and writing. In KS1, talking and listening and the reading activities are developed appropriately into tasks such as illustration, labelling, sequencing, sentence construction and simple story writing. The older children write in a wide range of formats and they are encouraged to consider style and become increasingly aware of the audience for their writing. In both key stages, the children make effective use of word-banks, thesauri and dictionaries. As they progress through the school, the children become increasingly competent and confident in the use of computers; they often compose work directly on the screen, and use the computer to draft and re-draft their work as well as to illustrate and present it. Samples of their work contribute to the school's participation in the Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment ICT accreditation scheme.

2.13 The teachers have a good knowledge of the children and they assess their work routinely in class and use standardised tests to record their progress in English and mathematics. Records of the children's progress are maintained from year to year, including copies of reports to parents and representative samples of the children's work. The children's books are marked regularly and in the best practice, the teachers add comments that highlight the strengths of the children's work and provide guidance on how they can improve further. This good practice should be shared and implemented more consistently throughout the school.

2.14 The children in KS1 have daily sessions of activity-based learning. Themes and topics are planned to provide a range of interesting activities that complement the work in other curricular areas and enable the children to explore and consolidate aspects of their learning through a range of practical activities. In the lessons observed, the children were confident in their work and showed a good level of independence and enjoyment. In order to enhance the experiences further, the staff should provide more natural and authentic items into some of the activities and provide more opportunities to develop the children's thinking skills and personal capabilities.

2.15 Special educational needs is given a high priority within the school and significant resources have been made available for this work. The school has identified 13 children who require additional support with aspects of their learning; five children have statements of special educational need, two children are currently involved in the Reading Recovery Programme and a further two children avail of peripatetic support twice weekly from an outreach teacher from the Southern Education and Library Board. The children's learning needs are identified at an early stage through a combination of observation and the use of standardised and diagnostic tests. The SENCO and the class teachers collaborate to prepare appropriate education plans which identify strategies and targets to promote improvement. The teachers and classroom assistants support the children in class; work is differentiated and well-matched to the children's ability. The staff monitor the children's progress closely and effective links are maintained with the parents and with external support agencies.

2.16 The Principal provides efficient and effective leadership for the school and combines his teaching responsibilities with the administration of the school. He is fully committed to the children's education and welfare and has the support of the teachers, the parents and the wider community. He has a good knowledge and understanding of primary education and takes a personal interest in the work of each class and the progress and development of individual children. He is well supported by the dedicated staff.

2.17 There is a strong collegial approach to the development and improvement of learning and teaching. The teachers support one another well; they discuss and share information and work closely as a team in preparing and implementing whole-school policies and procedures. The School Development Plan (SDP) identifies several important areas for development and an appropriate action plan has been drawn up to address each priority. The current staff development programmes provides good opportunities for the teachers to keep up-to-date with current trends and developments in education. Although the SDP has identified appropriate priorities for development, the staff should now consider adopting a more systematic and rigorous approach to the process of school self-evaluation.

2.18 The school accommodation is very well-maintained and has been greatly enhanced by the additional space provided by the recent extension. The school grounds are attractive and the standard of caretaking is excellent.

### **3. CONCLUSION**

3.1 The strengths of the school include:

- the very positive ethos that permeates the life and work of the school;

- the exemplary standards of behaviour of the children and their positive attitudes to learning;
- the very good relationships at all levels and the strong collegiality among the hardworking and dedicated staff;
- the quality of the teaching observed which ranged from satisfactory to very good;
- the good quality of the teachers' planning;
- the good quality of much of the children's written work;
- the importance given to the presentation of the children's work;
- the very good provision for the children who require learning support;
- the effective use of ICT to enhance the children's learning;
- the interesting and varied activities provided which enhance the children's learning;
- the good quality of the leadership provided by the Principal; and
- the support of the parents and the contribution made to the life and work of the school by the classroom assistants and other ancillary staff.

3.2 In the areas inspected, the school 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 school's capacity for sustained self-improvement.

No follow-up inspection is required.



### **HEALTH AND SAFETY ISSUES**

- The location of a large electricity pole and high voltage cables, located at the rear of the school building in the playground should be reviewed to ensure that they are not accessible by the children.
- The steel posts in the recently refurbished sports ground do not have safety padding to protect the children when this area is in use.

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