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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 Mary's Primary School
Cloughcor, Strabane

Inspected: May 2007

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BASIC INFORMATION SHEET (BIS) - PRIMARY SCHOOLS

- A. i. **School: St Mary's Primary** iii. **Date of Inspection: W/B 29.05.07**
Cloughcor, Strabane
 ii. **School Reference Number: 203-6095** iv. **Nature of Inspection: FI/En/ICT/SEN**

B.

School Year	2002/03	2003/04	2004/05	2005/06	2006/07
Year 1 Intake	23	28	30	30	26
Enrolments					
Primary	163	170	178	183	189
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):

94.1%

Primary & Reception	Nursery Unit	Special Unit
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- D. i. Number of Teachers
 (including the principal and part-time teachers): 8.6 - -
 (Full-time equivalent = 25 teaching hours)
- ii. PTR (Pupil/Teacher Ratio): 21.97 NI PTR: 20.5
- iii. Average Class Size: 27
- iv. Class Size (Range): 23 to 30
- v. Ancillary Support:
 Number of Hours **Per Week**:
- | | |
|---|------|
| i. Clerical support: | 27.5 |
| ii. Official Making A Good Start Support: | 30 |
| iii. Additional hours of other classroom assistant support: | 10 |
- vi. Number of children with statements of special educational needs: 7
- vii. Number of children who are not of statutory school age: 0
- viii. Percentage of children entitled to free school meals: 20.1%

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 St Mary's Primary School is situated approximately four miles from Strabane, just off the main Derry/Strabane Road. The school's enrolment has increased steadily over the past five years and presently stands at 189. Approximately 20% 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 the children from year 6. Of the 151 questionnaires issued to the parents, 37% were returned to the Department of Education (DE) and 21 contained additional written comments. The responses from the parental questionnaires indicated that the parents were very satisfied with all aspects of the work of the school. In their written comments they praised the commitment of the Principal and staff to the children, the strong pastoral provision and the success of the school in meeting the needs of the children. The governors expressed their appreciation of the quality of education and care provided for the children in the school and the dedication of all the staff.

1.3 In discussions held with the children, they talked enthusiastically about the things they enjoy in school, the encouragement they receive from the teachers and the friendly relationships throughout the school. They indicated that they are aware of what to do if they have any worries about their safety and well-being.

1.4 The Education and Training Inspectorate (Inspectorate) has reported to the Principal and the governors the main issues emerging from the questionnaires and the discussions.

1.5 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 relevant 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, the celebration of the children's achievements and the emphasis placed on making the school an inclusive environment. Further areas for improvement identified already within the school's development plan (SDP) include:

- a review of the current rewards system; and
- the establishment of a student council.

1.6 The inspection focused on the work in English and the effectiveness of the school's special educational needs (SEN) provision. In addition, the report makes reference to the contribution of information and communication technology (ICT) in promoting and supporting learning and teaching in English.

2. THE QUALITY OF THE CHILDREN'S WORK

2.1 The learning environment throughout the school is stimulating and interesting. All the classrooms and the circulation areas contain attractive displays of the children's work and other resources to support the children's learning. The children's behaviour is good; they are friendly and courteous, and they co-operate well with one another. Working relationships throughout the school and at all levels are excellent.

2.2 The school is held in high esteem in the local community and continues to develop the strong links it has established with the parents. There are many examples of the parents' views being sought and acted upon by the school's management.

2.3 The teachers plan conscientiously for their lessons. Planning is focused appropriately on the intended learning outcomes for the children and, in the best practice seen, identifies clearly work for the range of abilities within classes. Increasingly, the teachers are sharing the learning outcomes with the children at the outset of lessons and reflecting upon them in plenary sessions.

2.4 The teachers are hard-working and committed to the development and welfare of the children. The teaching observed was consistently of a high standard and often it was excellent. Where it was best, the tasks were matched well to the children's abilities, the teachers used oral work effectively to promote the children's understanding and the activities were interesting and stimulating. The school has a significant number of classroom assistants; they are also hard-working and contribute most effectively to the children's learning.

2.5 The children are well motivated to learn. They undertake their work conscientiously and show high levels of perseverance in completing tasks to good standards. Most take pride in their work and the quality of presentation is good.

2.6 The teachers mark the children's work regularly. They correct errors in the children's writing and annotate the work with positive, often personalised comments. In developing further the quality of marking, the teachers could indicate, through their comments, how the children may actually improve the quality of their work.

2.7 The children in the early years classes benefit from regular sessions of play-based learning. The children play co-operatively with one another and the teacher and classroom assistants interact in a very professional and effective way with the children. There are good opportunities seized to promote particularly the children's language skills.

2.8 The literacy co-ordinator has a clear view of the strengths and areas for improvement within the wider context of literacy. She monitors and evaluates regularly and systematically and has led staff development with the teachers in preparation for the revised curriculum. The area of literacy is led and developed effectively and there is evidence to show that the training and professional development provided for the staff by the literacy co-ordinator has had a positive effect on the learning and teaching in English and in other areas of the curriculum. Talking and listening activities are evident both within the programme for English and in other subjects throughout the curriculum. In all of the lessons observed, the children were actively engaged in learning through discussion in paired or group work activities. The children are ready and willing to talk with their teachers, peers and with visitors: they are also keen to answer questions in class and to ask questions when they are unsure of something. The teachers place a strong emphasis on the children listening

enthusiastically, respectfully and attentively to others and, in the best practice, skilful questioning by the teacher encourages them to speak at length and to justify and explain their comments and opinions. The children are encouraged to extend their vocabulary when supporting their comments and the atmosphere within the classrooms allows the children to feel confident when expressing their opinions. The quality and the range of work in talking and listening ranged from always good to excellent.

2.9 Reading is taught systematically throughout the school. In the early years classes the children are encouraged to listen and discuss stories and rhymes, and through shared reading activities they become more familiar with a wide range of books. The children build up a strong understanding of letters and sounds through a structured phonic approach and through many related oral activities. There is evidence to show they are acquiring the strategies to read unfamiliar words which add to the number of words they recognise. In key stage (KS) 2, novels are introduced and much of the written work arises from the study of these books. In the lessons observed the children demonstrated a good understanding and enjoyment of what they read. By the end of year 7 the majority of the children are reading well in line with their ability and for a significant number the standard of reading is high. Much of the talking, listening and reading contribute to the children's writing opportunities. By the end of year 1 the children are encouraged to write independently about their experiences and there is evidence to show that the children are writing sentences about school visits and other experiences. By the end of KS1 most of the children can write in paragraphs about personal experiences and can respond creatively to a particular poem or story. In KS2 much of the writing is influenced by work in other areas of the curriculum, particularly in relation to local history. The children respond in a mature manner and some show evidence of developing appropriate styles of writing. The children generally get good opportunities to write in different styles and for different purposes and audiences; for example, the children in year 4 wrote and read stories to the children in year 1.

2.10 The standards of work in English across the school are good. The vast majority of the children are making good or very good progress and this is evidenced by standardised tests, end of key stage results, reading records and work observed during the inspection. Increasingly, ICT is being used to support learning and teaching in English. The teachers use it in their planning, they make effective use of the data projector in their teaching and the children have access to a variety of software programs to enhance their learning. The children grow competent in their use of ICT, many are able to compose directly on screen, they can import graphics to support written text and can use the Internet to research work for their studies. The children in year 7 have composed their own Powerpoint presentations and are competent in making accompanying oral presentations to the whole class and larger groups. The school is well aware of the actions it needs to take in order to develop further the use of ICT to support the children's learning.

2.11 The school gives consistently good attention to promoting health and well-being. It has appropriate policies in place, such as health and social education, and staff emotional health and well-being. Initiatives are in place within the school to encourage the children to adopt healthy lifestyles such as healthy breaks, water provision, after school cookery club and healthy lunchboxes. There is evidence of commitment on the part of the staff to promoting healthy eating and to improving children's eating habits through assemblies, letters,

information leaflets and a class for parents. There are opportunities for all the children to participate in a wide range of physical activities, including gymnastics. The children demonstrate an excellent understanding of the importance of making healthy life choices. An assessment of the nature and quality of the arrangements for health and well-being practices within the school should be included in the SDP to comply with statutory regulations.

2.12 The Principal leads and manages the school very effectively. In this, she is ably supported by the Vice-principal. She is strongly committed to the life and work of the school. Under her leadership the school has made considerable and significant improvements in the quality of learning and teaching leading, specifically, to enhanced provision for the children. She is a strong advocate for review and improvement and has promoted significantly the school's competence in self-evaluating its provision. She enjoys the support and loyalty of the staff, the governors and the parents.

2.13 The SDP has been reviewed in light of DE's 2005 regulations. It sets out clearly the issues to be addressed and is supported by relevant action plans which guide the developments.

2.14 The school has a number of significant accommodation issues: the access and parking facilities are poor presenting both safety and convenience issues; the site is sloping constraining the play area for the children; there are insufficient permanent classrooms resulting in the majority of the children being taught in temporary accommodation; the library is small; there are insufficient facilities for the staff to meet privately with parents or for peripatetic teachers to work with the children; there are insufficient storage facilities; and the toilet provision for the number of children is inadequate.

3. CONCLUSION

3.1 The strengths of the school include:

- the welcoming, friendly and caring ethos;
- the good behaviour and responses of the children;
- the high esteem in which the school is held in the community, by the parents and by the governors;
- the dedication and commitment of all the staff to the children's education and welfare;
- the contribution of the non-teaching staff to the life and work of the school;
- the effective contribution of the classroom assistants to learning and teaching;
- the quality of the teaching which is consistently good and often excellent;
- the provision for, and the standards attained by the children in, English;
- the effective leadership of the literacy co-ordinator;

- the provision for, and sensitivity towards, the children with special educational needs;
- the variety of experiences enjoyed by the children in ICT;
- the commitment of the staff to review and development; and
- the effective, innovative and visionary leadership 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 children are being very well met. The parents can have confidence in the school's capacity for sustained self-improvement.

No follow-up inspection is required.

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