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*The Education and Training Inspectorate -  
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*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  
Rathfriland**

**Inspected: May 2007**

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## BASIC INFORMATION SHEET (BIS) - PRIMARY SCHOOLS

- A.
- i. **School: St Mary's Primary Rathfriland**
  - ii. **School Reference Number: 503-3004**
  - iii. **Date of Inspection: W/B 14.05.07**
  - iv. **Nature of Inspection: FI/En/SEN/ICT**

B.

School Year	2002/03	2003/04	2004/05	2005/06	2006/07
Year 1 Intake	9	6	13	9	16
<b>Enrolments</b>					
Primary	67	64	60	61	84
Reception	1	2	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): 94.25%

Primary & Reception	Nursery Unit	Special Unit
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- D.
- i. Number of Teachers  
(including the principal and part-time teachers): 5  
(Full-time equivalent = 25 teaching hours) - -
  - ii. PTR (Pupil/Teacher Ratio): 16.8 NI PTR: 20.5
  - iii. Average Class Size: 21
  - iv. Class Size (Range): 7 to 18
  - v. Ancillary Support:  
Number of Hours **Per Week**:
    - i. Clerical support: 12
    - ii. Official Making A Good Start Support: 20
    - iii. Additional hours of other classroom assistant support: 0
  - vi. Number of children with statements of special educational needs: 1
  - vii. Number of children who are not of statutory school age: 0
  - viii. Percentage of children entitled to free school meals: 22.62%

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

1.1 St Mary's Primary School is situated in the town of Rathfriland in County Down. Almost all the children come from the local area. The enrolment has increased significantly over the past year, from 61 children in 2005/06 to 84 at the time of the inspection. Around 22% of children are entitled to free school meals.

1.2 The inspection focused on English, the provision for special educational needs (SEN), information and communication technology and on the school's arrangements for pastoral care, including child protection.

1.3 As part of the inspection process, meetings were held with the Board of Governors (governors), a group of children in year 6, and with a group of children in year 7. The parents' views on aspects of the life and work of the school were sought by means of a confidential questionnaire; twenty-three of the 61 issued (38%) were returned to the Department of Education (DE), of which seven included a written comment. The parents' comments were wholly positive and very supportive of the school. The governors commented favourably on the dedication of the staff, the quality of the provision for the children, and the high regard with which the school is held in the community. The group of children in year 6 reported that they feel safe, enjoy school and know what to do in the event of a concern. The inspection endorses these positive views.

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

2.1 A caring and supportive ethos is evident throughout the school. The children are friendly and welcoming and relationships at all levels are very good. A small number of children whose English is an additional language (EAL) have enrolled in the school in recent years; they have integrated readily into the life of the school and the whole school community reports that this has been an enriching experience for all.

2.2 The children's self-esteem and confidence are boosted through regular reward initiatives such as a merit points system and a 'pupil of the week' award. Records of the children's achievements and samples of their work are displayed throughout the school. In some of the classrooms the displays are of a very high standard, often supporting aspects of the children's learning.

2.3 The children's experiences are enriched through regular visits to places of educational interest and by participation in local festivals. Games coaching and choral singing are provided within the school day; it is appropriate that the school is considering ways to broaden its extra-curricular programme.

2.4 Parents are kept well informed about the life and work of the school through regular written communication and annual meetings with the teachers. The Parents Group supports the work of the school by organising and supervising fund-raising events.

2.5 A secure and caring environment is provided for the children. The school has procedures in place which implement fully the guidance outlined in the relevant DE Circulars and has identified, appropriately, a few important areas for further development, including the need to update the child protection training for the non-teaching staff.

2.6 The school gives consistently good attention to promoting health and well-being. It has appropriate policies and initiatives in place which encourage the children to adopt healthy lifestyles. Initiatives include healthy breaks, water provision, 'brain gym' and kitchen and supervisor awards. There is evidence of commitment on the part of the staff to promoting healthy eating and to improving the children's eating habits, through, for example, assemblies, letters to parents, 'vegetable of the day' and relevant posters in the canteen and classrooms. The children demonstrate a very good understanding of the importance of making healthy life choices and there are opportunities for all children to participate in a range of physical activities during school.

2.7 While the teachers plan diligently for their lessons, there is variation in the approaches adopted, particularly in the structure of, and detail within, the half-termly plans. At its most effective, the planning sets out clear and appropriate learning outcomes and there is a suitable matching of tasks to the range of ability within each class. All of the teachers evaluate their teaching and, in the best practice, use the evaluations as a basis for subsequent planning.

2.8 The teachers are hard working and committed fully to the children's learning and development. In most of the lessons observed, the quality of the teaching was consistently good. In these instances, the teachers communicated clearly the intended learning outcomes for lessons, and, through well-managed discussion with the children, subsequently evaluated whether the intended learning was achieved. The teaching approaches often challenged the children to think for themselves, and the teachers set interesting tasks which were well matched to the wide range of abilities within each class. In the small number of instances where the teaching was less effective, opportunities were missed to extend the children's understanding and the activities failed to promote learning or hold the children's attention.

2.9 The children generally settle readily to their work, are attentive and, when properly motivated, are capable of focused and sustained effort. They learn to work together effectively in pairs and small groups and, by the end of key stage (KS) 2, most are confident and independent learners.

2.10 In years 1 and 2, the children have regular sessions of play-based learning. In the sessions observed, the children were engaged in a range of suitable activities, and the adults present, through effective questioning and prompting, encouraged them to talk about their learning. While the play activities contribute to the children's development, there is a need to revise the planning and record-keeping to ensure a stronger focus on the identification and achievement of the learning outcomes, and to provide a coherent programme which promotes continuity and progression in the children's understanding.

2.11 The development of the children's English is a feature of the work of the school. A stimulating and interesting literacy environment has been created in the classrooms; samples of the children's written work are displayed and collections of fiction and non-fiction texts are used effectively to support topic work and to stimulate the children's interests. The school library is well stocked and the KS2 children make regular school-time visits to the nearby public library. A scheme of work sets out a whole school programme for talking and listening, reading and writing; while this provides helpful guidance to the teachers, it should be revised to identify more clearly the strategies to be used to promote the children's reading skills, especially in the early years. In the best practice observed, the teachers, generally through topic work, integrate appropriately the children's reading, writing and talking and listening activities.

2.12 The children's reading skills are developed systematically across the school. In the early years class, the children are introduced to a range of books. They build up an awareness of print and become familiar with, and talk about, the stories they hear. As they progress, the children's ability to decode words improves as their sight vocabulary and phonic awareness develops. In addition, their fluency and understanding of text become increasingly proficient. In KS2, the children are exposed to a broad range of texts including Internet sources, class novels and reference books; a strength of this work is their ability to extract meaning and summarise information in support of class topics and individual projects. Effective links are made with other areas of the curriculum; during the inspection, for example, the year 7 children, as part of a study on Victorian life, were reading and discussing the novel 'Street Child'. By the end of KS2, most of the children read with accuracy, expression and good comprehension and achieve standards well in line with their ability.

2.13 The purposeful learning environment and the good relationships throughout the school help to promote the development of the children's oral skills. Most of the children are keen to express their thoughts and feelings, and they listen attentively and respectfully to their teacher and to one another. Regular activities such as Circle Time, shared story sessions and topic work, provide the children with valuable opportunities to talk about their learning, while paired and group sessions promote and enhance their listening skills. In most of the lessons observed, the children, generally, were actively engaged in learning through purposeful questioning and talk. In the years 4 and 5 class, for example, the children talked about the conditions for 'fair-testing' in a science investigation, while in the years 6 and 7 class, the children discussed the difference between fact and opinion in a persuasive writing activity. The quality and range of work in talking and listening ranged from generally sound, to excellent in a significant minority of lessons.

2.14 The children's letter formation skills are developed in the early years class; they are made familiar with print within their environment and encouraged to experiment with informal mark making activities during play-based learning. Through regular modelled and shared writing sessions, the skills of writing are developed progressively and the children become increasingly confident and competent in recording their ideas; by the end of KS1, most of the children are able to write sentences and short passages accurately and neatly. This work is usually supported by appropriate word banks and the effective use of dictionaries. In KS2, the children write for an increasing range of purposes, including letter and story writing, poetry, accounts of visits, book reviews, play-scripts and newspaper reports. In the best practice observed, the children are encouraged to write independently. In years 6 and 7, for example, much of the children's learning in geography and history was recorded in their own words. In other classes there is insufficient emphasis on independent writing; often there is an over reliance on worksheet activities that require single word or short responses. It is appropriate that the school is carrying out an audit of the range of writing provided for the children. There is variation in the overall standards of handwriting and general presentation of work.

2.15 Information and communication technology (ICT) is used on occasions to support the children's writing; opportunities are provided for the children to compose directly on screen and, at times, their work is enhanced by the importing of digital images. The school has identified the need to take advantage of the forthcoming refresh of computers in primary

classrooms to develop more systematically the role of ICT, and improve the ability of the teachers to embed and use ICT to support learning. The inspection findings confirm as appropriate the school's priorities for further staff development and the increased use of ICT by all the children.

2.16 The school has identified a small number of children who require additional support with their learning. The teachers use an appropriate range of tests and observations to establish early identification of those children who require help. The recently appointed support teacher and the learning assistant provide excellent support for the children, both on a withdrawal and an in-class basis. Under the guidance of the Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator, and in consultation with the class teachers, detailed and appropriate individual education plans have been drawn up; these are shared with parents and reviewed regularly. The needs of the EAL children are well provided for by the class teachers, the support teacher and the learning assistant; relevant individual and group plans are in place to improve the English and increase the confidence of these children.

2.17 The school has a detailed system for assessing, recording and reporting on the progress of the children; scores in a range of tests are analysed and form the basis for setting targets for individual improvement. The data gathered should be utilised further to provide information on the overall standards attained by the children in order to evaluate the quality of teaching and learning across the school. All of the teachers mark the children's work regularly and often with supportive and helpful comments, which at times enable the children to improve aspects of their performance.

2.18 The Principal is recently in post and combines successfully her teaching responsibilities and the administration and management of the school. She provides very effective leadership and has started to introduce a number of initiatives which include rationalising school development planning and developing self-evaluative practices to promote improvement; an immediate, significant and effective action was her recent appointment of the SEN/EAL support teacher. The Principal has initiated a detailed audit of all aspects of the school's provision; it is appropriate that this includes a review of roles, responsibilities and duties within the school. The outcomes of the audit, together with the findings of this inspection, will inform the drawing up of a new school development plan and the supporting action plans. The inspection endorses this as an appropriate priority; this work should include the further clarification of the roles of the various post-holders, and how they will monitor and evaluate the standards reached in their areas of responsibility.

2.19 While there are some shortcomings in the accommodation relating mainly to the age of the school, the building is well maintained and the standard of caretaking is good. The classroom assistants, catering staff and school secretary make a valuable contribution to the work of the school.

### **3. CONCLUSION**

3.1 The strengths of the school include:

- the very positive ethos, good relationships and the friendliness and openness of the children;

- the very high quality of the pastoral care, including the good attention given to promoting the health and well-being of the children;
- the consistently good teaching in most of the lessons observed;
- the hard-working and conscientious staff;
- the articulate oral responses from the children and their co-operative attitudes to one another and to their work;
- the development of the children's language and literacy;
- the good standards achieved by nearly all of the children, commensurate with their ability, by the end of KS2;
- the detailed record-keeping of the progress being made by the children as they move through the school;
- the excellent quality of the support for the small number of children with identified learning needs, including EAL children;
- the leadership of the recently-appointed Principal and her commitment to improvement;
- the support of the parents, governors and the wider community for the school; and
- the standard of the caretaking and cleaning.

3.2 The areas for improvement include the need to:

- review and revise planning for play-based learning and ensure that teaching is always appropriately matched to the wide range of abilities in the early years; and
- develop more systematically the role of ICT to support learning.

3.3 In the areas inspected the school has important strengths in most of its educational and pastoral provision. The inspection has identified a few areas for improvement which the school has the capacity to address to meet consistently the needs of all the learners.

3.4 The school's progress in the areas for improvement will be monitored by the District Inspector.



**HEALTH AND SAFETY**

- There is a need to widen the entrance to the school to ensure safer delivery and collection of children and goods.

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