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*The Education and Training Inspectorate -
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Providing Inspection Services for
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Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure**



INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

Education and Training Inspectorate

Report of a Focused Inspection

St Mary's Primary School Tempo

Inspected: October 2008

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 SCHOOL CONTEXT

St Mary's Primary School is situated in a rural area, eight miles from Enniskillen in Co Fermanagh. Most of the children who attend the school come from the surrounding area; a few of them travel from the Enniskillen area. The enrolment has ranged from 91 to 99 over the last five years and is currently 98. Approximately 7% of the children are entitled to receive free school meals. The school welcomes children from all cultures. Twenty-nine percent of the children are registered with a range of special educational needs according to the requirements of the Special Educational Needs Code of Practice.

1.2 FOCUS

The inspection focused on the quality of the children's experiences in literacy and numeracy and the use of information and communication technology (ICT) in promoting and supporting learning and teaching and the school's arrangements for pastoral care, including child protection.

1.3 THE VIEWS OF THE PARENTS, TEACHERS, GOVERNORS AND CHILDREN

The arrangements for the inspection of pastoral care and child protection included the opportunity for the parents and the teaching staff 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. Sixty-two questionnaires were issued to the parents; a majority (58%) were returned to the Department of Education (DE) and 14 contained additional written comments. The responses from the questionnaires indicated that almost all of the parents appreciate the care provided for the children, the school's encouragement for the children to respect and value the opinions of others and the regular information provided about the life and work of the school.

A minority of parents would like more information on how to help their child, and further opportunities for out of school activities. The issues arising from the parental questionnaires were shared with the Principal and governors and are to be taken forward by the school.

The governors expressed their appreciation of the welcoming ethos of the school, the sense of team-work within the school community and the school's reputation in the local community.

The children talked enthusiastically about the range of curriculum activities, the support provided by the teachers and classroom assistants and are aware of what to do if they have worries about their safety and well-being.

1.4 PASTORAL CARE

The quality of the arrangements for pastoral care in the school is very good. Among the strengths are the inclusive, supportive and caring family ethos within the school and the range and quality of the pastoral care and child protection policies which have been developed following appropriate consultation procedures with the children and parents. The school regularly awards achievement incentives to encourage the children's sense of self-esteem and self-confidence and has effective and appropriate links with the local community.

1.5 CHILD PROTECTION

The school has satisfactory arrangements in place for safeguarding children. These arrangements broadly reflect the guidance issued by the relevant Department and it is appropriate that the school has made arrangements for the named deputy designated teacher to avail of updated child protection training as soon as possible.

1.6 HEALTHY EATING/PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

The school gives very good attention to promoting healthy eating and physical activity, for example the healthy lunchbox programme and salad table, which encourage the children to adopt healthy lifestyles.

2. ACHIEVEMENTS AND STANDARDS

2.1 LEARNING

The learning environment in all the classrooms and throughout the school in the shared learning areas is instructive and stimulates the children to engage willingly and to develop their sensory awareness as they learn.

The staff create a positive climate for learning; the children readily approach the adults to ask questions, share stories and seek support to further their learning. The children are motivated to learn together in the classrooms and occasionally as a whole-school community through weekly assemblies. They display a sense of identity with their school and take a pride in the presentation of their work. During the inspection, the children openly talked about what they were learning and recalled previous learning experiences that they had enjoyed.

2.2 ENGLISH AND LITERACY

The quality and effectiveness of the provision for English and literacy is very good. By year 7 almost all the children are attaining standards in English that are in line with their age and ability levels and for a significant minority attainment is above the expected average levels. The school has identified a minority of children across years 4 to 7 that experience difficulty in reaching a very good standard in reading competence and provides in-class support in order to raise their standards of attainment.

The talking and listening experiences provided for the children, within all three key stages range from very good to outstanding. At foundation stage (FS) the children experience a range of interesting play and drama activities that develop their language, thinking skills and personal capabilities. The children display early self-management skills; for example, they use pictorial timetables, engage in sharing and turn-taking during conversations and listen to and follow instructions during story-time and play activities organised by the teacher. There is good opportunity to listen to and learn the sounds associated with initial letters and groups of letters; however, for those children experiencing delayed language development more focused and extensive teaching needs to be done to develop further listening skills and to

promote the children's early phonological awareness. In key stage (KS) 1 the children are encouraged to listen attentively, explore language, extend vocabulary and the meaning of words in order to deepen their understanding and comprehension skills. By the end of KS2 the children can express themselves confidently, offer reasons for their opinions and value the opinions of others.

Reading is taught systematically throughout the school. There are literacy-rich displays in the classrooms and good stocks of fiction and non-fiction books displayed: however, most of the classroom library areas are sparsely furnished and uninviting. In FS, the children learn to read key words and build up recognition through a range of text level appropriate books including some commercial reading scheme material. With the recent Northern Ireland Curriculum (NIC) training the approaches to the teaching of reading are being developed further and these are being kept under review in the school. In the best practice observed within KS1, the children are immersed in rich interactive language exchanges which effectively develop their comprehension and reading skills. The children's reading skills are developed further throughout KS2; novels and texts from a variety of sources including the Internet are effectively used. By year 7, all the children are using a range of shared modelled and guided reading strategies and almost all can read with fluency and understanding at an age-appropriate level.

The children's writing skills are planned and balanced between structured activities and more stimulating activities that involve meaningful contexts in which to write. In FS the children engage appropriately with print and have good opportunities for mark-making, and through multi-sensory and play experiences, begin to form letters accurately. As their skills develop, the children, with the support of teacher-modelled, shared and guided writing, begin to record their own ideas in simple words and sentences and then write personalised stories. By the end of KS1, most children are able to write independently in their own words. As they progress through KS2, the children's writing skills are developed further and applied to a broader range of purposes; and include the re-drafting and peer-editing of writing to improve their work. The children write for an increasing range of purposes including book reviews, letters, reporting and imaginative and descriptive writing and often make good connections to the arts in the curriculum.

2.3 MATHEMATICS AND NUMERACY

The quality and effectiveness of the provision for mathematics is very good. By year 7 the children are almost all attaining standards in mathematics that are in line with their age and ability levels and for a significant minority attainment is above the expected average levels. For a very small number attainment is below the expected levels. Across all classes there are high expectations and challenge for those who are mathematically able and appropriate support for those children who are experiencing difficulty.

The children's mathematical understanding is developed systematically throughout the school. In FS the children are provided with appropriate opportunities to develop mathematical language and concepts through activity based learning. The activities are set within the context of real life experiences, for example the children are learning about capacity through preparing and baking gingerbread men. A sound understanding of number is developed through class activities including songs, rhymes and stories. Mental mathematics is developed through the use of appropriate games and through problem-solving tasks. The children also have opportunities to estimate size, weight, capacity and length and

to explore shape, pattern, size, order and relationships. There are opportunities for the children to work individually, in pairs or in small groups; the year 2 children develop mathematical language and competence in its use within these group settings as they have the opportunity to explain their understanding of mathematical concepts to the younger children. Classroom displays further enhance the children's enjoyment and understanding of mathematics and the deployment of classroom assistants within group activities develops the potential learning experience for all the children.

In the KS1 class, the children's understanding of mathematical concepts and language is developed through practical activities. The use of open-ended questions, problem-solving tasks and investigative activities in other curricular areas develops the children's capacity to reason logically, think flexibly, make and justify decisions. The children are also encouraged to develop understanding of concepts through peer-questioning, explanations and demonstrations. The further development of mathematical language is based on previous learning experiences and new language is introduced in meaningful and thoughtful contexts. Resources are used imaginatively and follow-on activities are differentiated according to the children's stage of mathematical development. The children demonstrate confidence and enjoyment in mathematics through group and class discussion, perseverance with tasks and their ability to apply their skills in other curricular areas.

As the children progress to KS2 they consolidate and extend their mathematical learning. Mathematical concepts are taught within real life contexts and children are encouraged to make mathematical links in everyday examples such as identifying parallel lines in buildings and environmental features; and symmetry in nature and art. Mathematics is imaginatively connected across and within the curriculum particularly through creative and expressive topics, physical activity and healthy lifestyles. By year 7 the children demonstrate flexibility of mathematical processes and have confidence to reason, explain and justify answers. They have a sound understanding of place value, number, measures, shape and space and the handling of data. In particular the collection, analysis and presentation of data using ICT has been developed creatively, throughout the school and within relevant contexts of the children's own experiences and school activities.

3. THE QUALITY OF PROVISION FOR LEARNING

3.1 PLANNING

The teachers plan and prepare diligently for their work; a range of high quality detailed policies, set within the context of the school, guide the staff in delivering a broad and balanced curriculum. There is evidence of planning for continuity and progression through whole-school and individual class programmes; in particular the teachers work hard to make provision for the wide range of needs within the four composite classes. Learning outcomes are clearly identified in the majority of planners; there is a need to develop further the progression for the teaching and learning of phonics to support literacy programmes. There is effective evaluation of the learning intentions and these are used to inform future planning and meet the individual needs of children.

3.2 TEACHING

All teaching is within a composite class context. During the inspection, the teaching of a small number of outstanding lessons was observed; overall most of the teaching was very good or better. Where it was very good or better the teachers are clear about and share with the children the learning they wish to develop; they make good use of resources, in particular the interactive whiteboards (IWBs); they use oral work well, including effective questioning to promote the children's understanding and thinking skills; and they use plenary sessions to reinforce the key learning points where they provide opportunities for the children to talk about what they have written or experienced. The teaching of literacy and mathematics and the children's learning experiences are enhanced by the integration of ICT; appropriate learning platforms and IWB activities are used by both the teachers and the children to explore, express, evaluate and exhibit understanding and learning. The teaching and learning environment is supportive of the children's personal development skills.

3.3 ASSESSMENT

The teachers, supported by the classroom assistants, are developing appropriate processes for monitoring and evaluating the children's progress. The prompt interaction by the staff with the children ensures that relevant feedback for improvement is given. The use of target-setting during lessons for what the children intend to learn and the plenary sessions at the conclusion of the lessons to evaluate what learning has taken place is developing a self-evaluative culture. Marking of the children's work is positive though some further development is needed in order to take account of marking for improvement of recurrent errors in the children's work. The teachers use a variety of tests and observations to identify those children who require additional help with aspects of their learning. Individual records are kept to monitor the children's development and to inform the teachers' subsequent planning. Information on the children's progress is discussed with the parents through regular parent-teacher interviews and communicated through an annual written report.

3.4 SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS

The staff are aware of the difficulties and delays the children with special educational needs face. There are appropriate in-class support programmes which ensure all children have access to the NIC. The school promotes a strong sense of inclusion where each child is valued as an individual. The policy for special educational needs (SEN) has been reviewed and amended and is being kept under regular review.

The staff access professional advice from the Western Education and Library Board educational psychology service to assist their planning. Twenty-nine percent of the children are identified on the SEN register for specific help to improve learning. These children have individual education plans (IEPs) which are reviewed with parents three times per year. The IEPs take account of all of the information available about the individual children's needs. There are appropriate targets and support strategies to guide the day-to-day work of the teacher. The children's progress in literacy and numeracy is monitored to measure progress and development against targets previously set to promote improved attainment.

4. LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

4.1 LEADERSHIP

The teaching Principal is in his fourth year in post; he is highly-motivated, hard-working, and fully committed to the strategic development of the school. He provides very high quality leadership and management of the school; his response to staff changes and to the introduction of the revised curriculum and early implementation of the NIC is positive and productive. The monitoring role adopted by the Principal and governors to manage curriculum change, staff development and school policy implementation supports ongoing improvement.

Each of the co-ordinators demonstrates a vision for further development and improvement of their areas of responsibility in SEN, literacy and numeracy. It will be important that the good foundation of policy and action-planning for improvement led by the Principal and assisted by various teachers, for example, the permanent FS teacher who was not present at the time of the inspection is embedded and developed further by the whole-school team.

4.2 PLANNING FOR IMPROVEMENT

The improvement process is clearly linked to a well constructed school development plan (SDP). There are very good opportunities for consultation about the SDP within the school community and the parents, governors and children are involved in the process of school improvement. There is efficient use of data and effective target-setting based on the outcomes of internal school standardised tests and the external DE benchmarking data. Appropriate policies and action plans are in place; for example, in teaching and learning, in literacy and numeracy and for SEN, which effectively support a culture of review and development for school improvement. The school gives very good attention to and meets fully the requirements of the School Development Plans Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2005.

4.3 RESOURCES, FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT AND GOVERNANCE

The school governors have agreed clear and appropriate priorities for school development and for raising the attainments and enriching the experiences of the children. The governors make positive contributions to ensuring that policies are written in reader friendly language and that there are appropriate reporting structures for school improvement. The school budget is effectively kept under review. There is a need to ensure that the governors and the employing authorities prioritise and address the accommodation matters listed in the Appendix. The quality of the caretaking in the school is of a very high standard.

5. CONCLUSION

5.1 The strengths of the school include:

- the Principal's very high quality leadership and management demonstrated through a positive response made to the introduction of the NIC and the development of Pastoral Care and Child Protection policies and procedures;

- the skill of the staff to create a strong family ethos which effectively promotes a safe and secure learning environment; and the children's very good behaviour and good communication with visitors;
- the outstanding to good quality of the teaching which is effectively promoting the children's thinking skills and personal capabilities thus increasing their capacity to learn;
- the standards in English and mathematics attained by the children including the enhanced learning experiences enjoyed by the children through the use of ICT;
- the commitment and vision expressed by the co-ordinators to review, development and improvement; and
- the active role of the school governors in school improvement.

In the areas inspected, the quality of education provided by this school is very good. The school is meeting very effectively the educational and pastoral needs of the learners; and has demonstrated its capacity for sustained self-improvement.

ACCOMMODATION

- A suitability of the school accommodation to meet the needs of the NIC should be conducted as the size and design of the KS1 and KS2 classrooms are restricting the children's opportunities for active learning and the development of their self-management skills.
- The outdoor areas have several trip hazards and are limiting the potential of the space for safe outdoor play, learning and physical activity.
- The staff and school secretary share the same room and this is leading to conflicts of interest between staff meetings and the reception of visitors by the secretary.
- The Principal has no office and currently meets the parents and visitors in a converted storeroom requiring access via a classroom.
- There is no designated area for peripatetic teachers who teach children with additional learning needs.
- The dining hall is used for physical education and the storage of dinner tables and chairs along the perimeter of the hall is a potential risk for injury to the children.
- There are leaks in the flat roof.

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