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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 Michael's Primary School
Finnis

Inspected: March 2007

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BASIC INFORMATION SHEET (BIS) - PRIMARY SCHOOLS

- A. i. **School: St Michael's Primary Finnis** iii. **Date of Inspection: W/B 19.03.07**
 ii. **School Reference Number: 503-3006** 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	12	7	8	14
Enrolments					
Primary	63	68	73	75	70
Reception	3	2	4	5	6
Nursery Class/Classes	0	0	0	0	0
Special Unit	1	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%

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) | 3.72 | - | - |
| ii. | PTR (Pupil/Teacher Ratio): | 20.43 | NI PTR: 20.5 | |
| iii. | Average Class Size: | 19 | | |
| iv. | Class Size (Range): | 15 to 21 | | |
| v. | Ancillary Support:
Number of Hours Per Week : | | | |
| | i. Clerical support: | | 20 | |
| | ii. Official Making A Good Start Support: | | 10 | |
| | iii. Additional hours of other classroom assistant support: | | 40 | |
| vi. | Number of children with statements of special educational needs: | | 5 | |
| vii. | Number of children who are not of statutory school age: | | 6 | |
| viii. | Percentage of children entitled to free school meals: | | 8.5% | |

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 St Michael's Primary School is situated in Finnis, a small village between Rathfriland and Dromara, in County Down. The school enrolment has remained steady over the past three years and stands currently at 76. The majority of the children come from the surrounding rural area. Almost 8.5% of the children are entitled to free school meals. Six-per cent of the children have been identified as requiring additional support with aspects of their learning.

1.2 Over the past three years, there have been a significant number of substitute teachers employed by the school, due to the long-term illness of two permanent staff members. At the time of the inspection, two substitute teachers were employed at the school.

1.3 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 (BoG) and a group of children from year 6. Forty-seven questionnaires were issued to parents; approximately 80% were returned to the Department of Education (DE) of which 23 contained additional written comments. The responses from the parental questionnaires indicated that the majority of parents were satisfied with most aspects of the school's provision. In particular, they highlighted that they were appreciative of the friendly and supportive atmosphere in the school, the progress made by the children and the commitment of the staff. A minority of parents, however, expressed concern about the lack of information they receive about the children's learning and progress in school. All concerns and areas for clarification raised by the parents have been discussed with the Principal and the BoG.

1.4 At the meeting with the BoG, the governors expressed their appreciation of the range of opportunities available for the children, the quality of learning and teaching in the school, the support of the parents, and the commitment of the Principal and the staff.

1.5 In discussions held with the year 6 children, they talked openly and positively about their experiences in the school, the extra-curricular activities available to them, and the care and support provided by their teachers. They indicated that they feel happy and safe in school and that they know how to seek help if they have a problem or concern.

1.6 The inspection focused on the work in English and information and communication technology (ICT) across the curriculum and the effectiveness of the school's special education needs provision. The inspection also evaluated the school's procedures for pastoral care, including child protection.

2. THE QUALITY OF THE CHILDREN'S WORK

2.1 This is a happy and welcoming school; the Principal and staff have established a friendly and orderly atmosphere, which promotes a caring ethos, based on mutual respect and good working relationships at all levels. The Principal and staff are dedicated and hardworking; they know the children well and relate to them effectively. The children are pleasant, courteous and well behaved. The non-teaching staff, including the classroom assistants and the school secretary, make a valuable contribution to the life and work of the school.

2.2 The foyer, corridors and classrooms contain informative displays, which include samples of the children's art, written and topic work, and photographs to celebrate some of activities in which they have been involved. The school building is well maintained and the standard of caretaking is good.

2.3 The school's programme for the promotion of health and well-being has many strengths including a healthy break policy and water provision. Such arrangements encourage the children to adopt healthy life-styles. Since 1995, the school has received, annually, the Boost Better Breaks award. There is a developing commitment to promoting and reinforcing healthy eating through an annual information evening, open nights and letters to parents. The children demonstrate a good understanding of the importance of making healthy life choices, and opportunities are provided for them to participate in a wide range of physical activities both during and after school.

2.4 The school extends the children's experiences, beyond the formal curriculum, through sports coaching, visitors to the school, Irish dancing, French lessons and pottery classes. The children benefit from educational trips and visits to local places of interest in connection with their work in geography, history and science. In addition, there are strong Education for Mutual Understanding links with a local primary school.

2.5 The school is supported well by the parents. The staff report that there is a high attendance of parents and other members of the local community at, for example, parent teacher meetings, school productions, and social and sporting events. The school also benefits from a well-established Parent Teacher Association which organises fundraising events to provide additional support for the life and work of the school.

2.6 There are many strengths in the quality of the arrangements for pastoral care and child protection. The BoG, staff, parents and children are fully aware of the school's procedures and have had the opportunity to contribute to a range of helpful policies that guide the work of the school. The school has procedures in place which implement the guidance outlined in the relevant DE circulars and has identified appropriately and area for improvement which it is currently addressing. Among the strengths are the supportive and caring ethos throughout the school, and the good use of praise and encouragement in class to affirm the children's good work and positive behavior. The area for improvement identified is the need to update the training for the recently appointed designated teachers.

2.7 Each teacher has responsibility for a composite class which includes either two year groups and in one instance a year 1 group and a reception group. This places considerable demands on them in terms of planning, monitoring and evaluation of the work across the different year groups. There are six children under statutory school age enrolled in the reception class and the school will need to review its provision for reception, to ensure that it is in line with the 'Curricular Guidance for Pre-School Education' issued by DE, if it wishes to continue with provision for reception children.

2.8 The teachers prepare thoroughly for their lessons. The planning is comprehensive and sets out the differentiated content of the work to be covered along with the tasks, resources and assessment methods to be used. At the time of the inspection the substitute teachers were making effective use of the planning provided by the school.

2.9 In the lessons observed during the inspection, the quality of teaching was always satisfactory and in the majority of lessons, it was good. In the best practice, the teachers shared the intended learning outcomes with the children; they selected appropriate resources and purposeful contexts for well-paced differentiated activities to enable the children to develop and apply their literacy skills across the curriculum.

2.10 The majority of children can talk confidently about their work and are able to maintain their concentration when engaged in listening activities. In the best practice, the children responded well to questioning that assisted them to organise their ideas and to clarify their understanding. This good practice needs to be disseminated across the classes. By the end of key stage (KS) 2 the majority of the children are articulate and confident in expressing their views and listening to others.

2.11 Generally, the children's reading skills are developed regularly and systematically. The teachers use a range of teaching approaches and resources to cater for the interests and needs of the children. These include the use of commercial schemes supported by sets of novels, some Big Books and a range of reference texts including the internet. The children are also encouraged to make regular use of class libraries. The school monitors the children's standards in reading, through regularly administered standardized tests, and the frequent use of oral and written questioning to assess understanding. The test results indicate that a majority of children reach a standard of reading competence comparable to children of a similar age. The school, through its own process of self-evaluation, has identified the need to review and update the current reading scheme to take account of the resources and guidance available through the Northern Ireland Literacy Strategy.

2.12 The writing activities build upon the children's talking, listening and reading skills. The children have good opportunities to write for a range of purposes which include book reviews, poetry, designing posters, creative stories, and project work for displays. In both key stages the children make good use of dictionaries and thesauri to support and improve the quality of their writing. The school has identified the need to provide more opportunities for the children to develop and extend their persuasive writing skills.

2.13 The school is in the process of reviewing the provision for structured play. The younger children benefit from regular sessions of structured play to support their learning. They are encouraged to work together, make decisions, observe, explore and to be imaginative. In the lessons observed the teachers and classroom assistants work well together to develop the children's social skills, confidence and understanding. It will be important that the current guidance for play is updated to outline clearly the continuity and progression in the children's play experiences expected in years 1-4.

2.14 The children's work is marked regularly and supportively. In the best practice, the teachers mark and annotate the children's work indicating appropriately what has been achieved and how, if necessary, the work could be improved. In addition, they ensure that the children have an opportunity to make the relevant written corrections.

2.15 The school is developing its provision in the use of ICT to support learning and teaching across the curriculum. The staff have benefited from the guidance provided by the ICT support services of the Southern Education and Library Board. They have made a good start to integrate the use of ICT into their planning, and to develop further strategies to record,

monitor and evaluate more effectively the children's work in ICT across the curriculum. It will be important that in this planning there is an appropriate balance between the ICT skills taught and their creative application across the curriculum, particularly to extend and challenge the more able children in both key stages.

2.16 In KS1, the children have opportunities to word-process their own stories and poems in a variety of styles, and insert clip art and borders to good effect. In the structured play lessons, the younger children have opportunities to use a range of educational games and the programmable Roamer to reinforce aspects of their awareness and understanding of direction, number, colour, shape, sorting and matching. In KS2, the children are able to research the Internet confidently and refine and adapt the information to suit their needs. In addition they have opportunities to use modelling software and to create and interrogate databases. The school, however, recognises that the communication and information-handling strands predominate and that the children need more opportunities to control devices, use multimedia software, create and manipulate digital images including animation and to communicate electronically.

2.17 The school uses appropriate screening and diagnostic tests, together with the teachers' observations, to identify, from an early stage, those children who require additional learning support. The special needs co-ordinator liaises with class teachers to prepare individual education plans (IEPs) for each child. These plans are reviewed on a regular basis and the progress is reported to the parents. Overall, the short-term targets in the IEPs need to be more sharply focussed and measurable to guide and assess the children's progress and to inform the teachers' future planning for improvement. The school needs to update its special needs policy to take account of the new legislation for the special educational needs disability order.

2.18 The children's progress is monitored through a combination of standardised tests, end of year and key stage assessments. The school uses the outcomes of these assessments to maintain a record of progress, and identify appropriate strategies to improve further the standards the children attain. Each year the parents receive a detailed written report containing comments on the children's progress in the main curricular areas. In addition, the parents are encouraged to meet with the teachers, both on a formal and informal basis, to discuss their children's educational and pastoral needs. As part of the schools preparation for the revised curriculum it is reviewing the timing of its current arrangements for assessment and consultation with parents.

2.19 The Principal has been in post for 14 years; he is committed to the life and work of the school, and encourages a collegiate approach to curriculum development work and to raising further the standards that the children achieve. He sets a very positive tone for the work of the school and has established effective routines for the organisation and administration of the day-to-day running of the school. In addition, the Principal makes effective use of the school's quantitative internal and external data to inform planning and to set targets to monitor the children's progress. However, the Principal avails infrequently of the principal release days, and the funding made available is used to support the overall school budget. This adds very significantly to his workload, his teaching commitment and his administrative duties.

2.20 The School Development Plan (SDP) sets out a list of key areas for improvement, based on the school's current evaluation of its curricular and organisational needs over a three-year period. It does not conform fully to the requirements and guidance set out in the DE circular 2005/19 on school development planning. There is a need to review the SDP in the light of the inspection findings.

2.21 The school's accommodation is good and the recent refurbishment has added to the quality of the overall provision.

3. CONCLUSION

3.1 The strengths of the school include:

- the caring, supportive atmosphere for learning and teaching;
- the good relationships between the staff and the children;
- the good behaviour and responses of the children;
- the approaches adopted to promote a healthy lifestyle among the children;
- the contribution of the secretary and support staff to the work of the school;
- the hard-working Principal and teachers;
- the commitment of the Principal and the teachers to improvement and the progressive development of the school;
- the effective analysis of the school's external and internal data to monitor and evaluate the children's progress; and
- the valuable contribution made by the parents, support staff and the BoG to the life and work of the school.

3.2 The areas for improvement include:

- the greater use of ICT to promote and support learning and teaching in literacy across the curriculum;
- the need to extend the range of writing across the curriculum; and
- the need to consider the appropriateness of the arrangements for meeting the learning needs of the reception children, to ensure that the provision is in line with the DE circular 'Curricular Guidance for Pre-School Education'.

3.3 In the areas inspected, the school has important strengths in most of its educational and pastoral provision. The inspection has identified minor areas for improvement which the school has the capacity to address.

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

HEALTH AND SAFETY

- Arrangements need to be made to equip the school with a secure door access system.

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