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*The Education and Training Inspectorate -
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Department of Education
Department for Employment and Learning
Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure



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Education and Training Inspectorate

Report of a Focused Inspection

**St Oliver Plunkett's Primary School and Nursery Unit
Toomebridge**

Inspected: March 2009

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BASIC INFORMATION SHEET (BIS) - PRIMARY SCHOOLS

- A. i. School: **St Oliver Plunkett's Primary Toomebridge** iii. Date of Inspection: **W/B 09.03.09**
 ii. School Reference Number: **303-3303** iv. Nature of Inspection: **FI/Ma/En/ICT**

B.

School Year	2004/05	2005/06	2006/07	2007/08	2008/09
Year 1 Intake	22	19	26	19	27
Enrolments					
Primary	138	134	144	139	142
Reception	0	0	0	0	0
Nursery Class/Classes	21	26	26	26	26
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): 94.4%

	Primary & Reception	Nursery Unit	Special Unit
D. i. Number of Teachers (including the principal and part-time teachers): (Full-time equivalent = 25 teaching hours)	8	0.5	0
ii. PTR (Pupil/Teacher Ratio):	17.75	NI PTR: 20.8	
iii. Average Class Size:	20.28		
iv. Class Size (Range):	13 to 28		
v. Ancillary Support: Number of Hours Per Week :			
i. Clerical support:		30	
ii. Official Making A Good Start Support:		35	
iii. Additional hours of other classroom assistant support:		45	
vi. Percentage of children with statements of special educational needs:		0%	
vii. Total percentage of children on the Special Needs Register:		29.6%	
viii. Number of children who are not of statutory school age:		0	
ix. Percentage of children entitled to free school meals:		22.5%	

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 SCHOOL CONTEXT

St Oliver Plunkett's Primary School is situated in the village of Toomebridge, County Antrim. The children come from the village and the surrounding rural area. The enrolment of the school has decreased gradually in the last ten years and presently stands at 142. Just over 22% of the children are currently entitled to free school meals. The school has identified approximately 30% of the children who require additional support with aspects of their learning. At the time of the inspection, a substitute teacher was employed in year 1.

1.2 FOCUS

The focus of the inspection was 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. The school's arrangements for pastoral care, including child protection, were also evaluated.

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

The arrangements for the inspection 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. One hundred questionnaires were issued to parents; approximately 50% were returned to the Department of Education (DE) of which 18 contained additional written comments. The majority of the responses indicated a high level of satisfaction with the school. The responses from the parental questionnaires indicate that the parents believe their children are safe, secure and well-settled at the school; they appreciate in particular the commitment of the Principal and staff, and the wide range of extra-curricular activities provided for the children.

Four of the teachers completed the online questionnaire and all commented positively on the very good working relationships across the school.

The governors expressed their appreciation of the positive ethos within the school and the high quality of the pastoral care provided for the children.

The children in year 6 spoke very positively about their enjoyment of school life, their involvement in the drafting of school rules and the opportunities to take part in charity events and after-school clubs. They reported that they feel safe, and know whom to turn to in the event of a concern.

The views of the parents, the teachers and the children have been shared with the Principal and the governors.

1.4 PASTORAL CARE

The quality of provision for pastoral care is very good. The children are well-mannered, friendly and courteous; their behaviour is very good. The teachers make good use of praise and encouragement to motivate the children; the appropriate balance between rewards and sanctions contributes well to the very positive ethos, which is evident throughout the school.

The staff have created an attractive learning environment for the children. The bright displays throughout the school celebrate the children's work, and record their activities and achievements. The classroom assistants, office staff, cleaning staff and other ancillary personnel contribute significantly to promoting and maintaining a pleasant working environment for the children. The children's learning experiences are further enriched through the Extended Schools programme, which includes a Breakfast Club and Homework Club. The children also have the opportunity to participate in a range of personal development initiatives such as HeartStart, Kidscape and the Pyramid Club facilitated by Barnados. The school has a long established Education for Mutual Understanding link with a neighbouring school and the children's learning and social development are enhanced through regular visits to places of educational interest and by visitors to the school.

1.5 CHILD PROTECTION

The school has very good comprehensive arrangements in place for safeguarding children. These arrangements reflect the guidance issued by DE.

1.6 HEALTHY EATING AND PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

The school gives very good attention to promoting healthy eating and physical activity. The children and the parents have agreed to a Healthy Breaks policy and the school has meaningful links with external organisations to promote healthy eating. There are regular opportunities for the children to engage in sporting activities and energetic physical play. All the school initiatives combine well to encourage the children to adopt healthy lifestyles.

2. ACHIEVEMENTS AND STANDARDS

2.1 LEARNING

The children show interest and motivation in their work. They are responsive and settle quickly to the set tasks and complete them to a satisfactory standard or better. They co-operate well with one another, undertake independent tasks with confidence and the older children work effectively in groups. More opportunities are needed to enable the children to apply their thinking and problem-solving skills in a variety of contexts, including play-based learning.

2.2 ENGLISH AND LITERACY

The overall provision for literacy is satisfactory. By the end of key stage (KS) 1 most of the children achieve the expected level of attainment for children of their age; however, by the end of KS2, a minority of children do not achieve the expected level of attainment in English. A recent literacy audit has provided a useful evaluation of the work in English and has resulted in the development of a new literacy policy to improve the learning and teaching throughout the school with an appropriate focus on the development of the children's talking and listening experiences.

The strengths of the provision include the opportunities provided to promote and support literacy across the curriculum, the effective use of ICT following focused research, the banding of the commercialised reading scheme, the review and development of the teachers' planning and the developing opportunities for parents to contribute to and support their child's learning in literacy.

The children are generally keen and able to talk about their learning. In the foundation stage (FS) and KS1, activities such as the use of songs and rhymes, puppets and role-play promote the children's oral skills and help them grow in confidence.

As they progress through KS2, the children's talking and listening skills continue to be supported through drama, group and paired work. By the end of KS2 most of the children can express themselves clearly and confidently. In the best practice, the teachers provided opportunities to promote the children's talking and listening and develop their confidence in sharing ideas through discussion, group work and plenary sessions. The children are being introduced to the concept of reflecting on their own work. On occasions, routine or closed question and answer sessions and overly adult-directed introductions limit the children's oral responses.

Throughout the FS and KS1, the children enjoy listening to stories and show an interest in fiction and non-fiction books. They are acquiring basic reading skills through modelled and shared reading sessions and the development of phonological awareness. Book areas are used to encourage the browsing and handling of books. Reading is further promoted by the Storytelling Club, and 'Literacy Week' which is aimed at involving parents more fully in their child's learning and promoting the children's interest in reading. In KS2, the children develop their reading skills through guided reading, class novels and library books; most can read with fluency and expression and can talk, with confidence, about their reading habits. However, a significant number of children lack confidence and appropriate strategies to tackle new words. The school has identified the need to raise further the standards in reading.

In the FS, the children develop their letter formation and word-building skills through simple sentence structure, writing frames, worksheets and shared writing activities. In KS1 the children are beginning to express their ideas independently and shared reading tasks are suitably linked to writing activities. There is a need to develop further the children's skills and strategies to become more confident and independent writers. By KS2 the children are writing in a variety of styles and for a range of audiences; they are encouraged to improve their writing through basic grammar, spelling and writing conventions. The children's writing is celebrated through displays around the school and in opportunities to read and write poetry. The teachers need to provide a broader range of more open-ended contexts for writing in order to foster the children's creativity and to provide greater challenge to the more able children.

2.3 MATHEMATICS AND NUMERACY

The overall provision for mathematics is satisfactory. By the end of KS1 most of the children achieve the expected level of attainment for children of their age; however, a minority of the children do not achieve the expected level of attainment by the end of KS2.

The strengths of the provision include the scheme of work for numeracy which is detailed and comprehensive and which provides an appropriate framework for progression in the children's mathematical understanding. In the areas of shape and space and measures, the provision is good with teachers working effectively to ensure that the children develop a sound understanding of concepts. Overall, however, the progression outlined in the scheme is not consistently reflected in the learning experiences provided for all the children.

Mental mathematics sessions were observed in most classes. In the most effective practice the pace was good, the activities engaged and motivated the children and the teachers used good questioning techniques to challenge the children's thinking and to encourage them to explain their strategies. On other occasions, expectations were for most children too low, the pace was slow and there were limited opportunities for the children to explain the processes used.

In the FS, the children are able to sort, order numbers, make patterns and handle data through a combination of suitable oral and practical work. More opportunities should be provided to enable the children to consolidate and extend their mathematical language, concepts and understanding through a range of more challenging play activities.

By the end of KS2, most of the children are able to perform simple routine calculations, create simple scale drawings and use mathematical programmes which increase their understanding of certain aspects of money, measurement and time.

While there are some strengths in the provision, there are also important areas for improvement. They include the need to ensure that the children make sufficient progress through KS2, to increase the challenge for the more able children and to develop further the children's ability to think mathematically by providing investigative and problem-solving activities matched appropriately to their abilities.

Information and communication technology is used regularly throughout the school to support the learning and teaching of English and mathematics, with teachers and children making good use of interactive whiteboards, computer programs and websites. The year 7 children have successfully participated in the Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment ICT Accreditation scheme. Most of the children are confident and proficient in the use of ICT.

3. THE QUALITY OF PROVISION FOR LEARNING

3.1 PLANNING

The whole-school planning for English and mathematics provides clear guidance for the teachers and specifies a broad range of learning experiences for the children. The teachers' planning is comprehensive and very detailed. Appropriate teaching strategies are identified, including whole-class teaching and opportunities for group and individual work. In addition, opportunities for assessment are identified and the appropriate resources are included. The planning is evaluated regularly by the teachers and by the Principal. On occasions, the teaching and learning strategies outlined in the planning are not developed sufficiently in the classroom practice.

3.2 TEACHING

The quality of the teaching observed was evaluated as satisfactory or better; in a minority of lessons, it was very good. In the best practice, all of the children were involved and engaged in their learning; the teaching was appropriately matched to their needs, attractively resourced and well-structured, often with a strong focus on sharing and consolidating the learning intentions with the children. These lessons were also well-paced and stimulating, and a clear partnership in learning existed between the teachers and the children. On occasions, when the teaching was less effective, the level of the content was too low, the children had too few opportunities to engage in meaningful practical work and the pace of the lesson was slow. To enhance further the teaching across the school, more attention should be given to differentiating further the activities and tasks to ensure greater challenge and extension for all children, particularly the more able.

3.3 ASSESSMENT

The parents are kept well informed of their children's progress through parental interviews and written reports. The school maintains information and performance data on the children's progress. The staff use the results from standardised tests and DE benchmarking data to assess the level of the children's achievement in literacy and numeracy. All of the teachers mark the children's work regularly. In all classes, the work is marked with supportive comments; in the most effective practice, the marking informs the children of how they have met the agreed success criteria and often indicates to them how to improve further aspects of their performance. The children at KS2 keep 'Learning Logs' in which they record their evaluations of their own learning. Many are beginning to set meaningful targets for self-improvement.

3.4 SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS

The school strives to promote a strong sense of inclusion in which each child is valued. The school's planning for special educational needs highlights appropriately the importance of early identification of those children who experience difficulties in their learning and is linked closely to the pastoral care policy.

The children's needs are met through additional support teaching in withdrawal sessions involving individual children and small groups. The learning support teacher observed during the inspection is highly supportive of the children and uses a good range of teaching strategies to enhance their literacy skills. The children respond positively to the encouragement given by her.

The special educational needs co-ordinator liaises closely with the class teachers in the writing of educational plans which identify specific targets and support strategies for each child. She monitors the children's progress regularly, targeting help where it is needed. There is good evidence of the children's increasing involvement in the setting of and reflection on their personal learning targets. The children who make satisfactory progress in the additional learning support sessions are appropriately discontinued, but continually reviewed.

4. LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

4.1 LEADERSHIP

The Principal has been in post for just over ten years. He has a clear vision for the school which he communicates well to the children, staff, parents, governors and the local community. His concern and care for the children and the staff are very evident. The school has experienced a significant number of staffing changes in recent years and this has affected adversely the development and co-ordination of key curricular areas. The roles and responsibilities of various post-holders and other members of staff have recently been reviewed and re-organised. It is important that the role of the co-ordinators in monitoring and evaluating the quality of the teaching and learning is strengthened to ensure that the children achieve higher standards in literacy and numeracy, particularly at KS2.

4.2 PLANNING FOR IMPROVEMENT

The school development plan (SDP) meets the requirements of the Education (School Development Plans) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2005. In adjusting the SDP in response to the inspection, the challenge now facing the school's leadership team is to identify appropriate strategies to address the issue of underachievement throughout the school and implement them consistently across all of the classes. The school is developing a culture of self-evaluation, and should begin to analyse more rigorously the available performance data in order to draft more sharply focused plans for improvement in literacy and numeracy.

4.3 STAFF DEVELOPMENT

The priorities for staff development have been identified and the staff are beginning to disseminate and implement many aspects of the Northern Ireland Curriculum training. The teachers have commented favourably on recent opportunities to collaborate through team teaching in the use of ICT to support learning. Training opportunities have been provided for the learning support staff and many are developing their skills through their involvement in the Extended Schools programme.

5. CONCLUSION

5.1 The strengths of the school include:

- the very good quality of the pastoral care provision and the orderly, purposeful learning environment which promotes positive behaviour and celebrates the children's achievements;
- the dedication and commitment of the Principal and the teachers, the contribution made by the support assistants and the developing sense of team-spirit among all the staff;
- the quality and effectiveness of the provision for those children identified as requiring additional help with aspects of their learning;
- the effective use of ICT to support learning and teaching;

- the success to date of the Extended Schools programme, which is well managed and shows evidence of good participation and retention rates; and
- the effective links established with other agencies and the many opportunities provided for the parents to become more involved in the life and work of the school.

5.2 The areas for improvement include the need:

- to identify and disseminate the best practice across the whole school in order to promote greater consistency in the quality and effectiveness of teaching and learning; and
- to establish a more rigorous approach to monitoring and evaluation to enable the leadership team to determine its priorities for development, ensuring sufficient challenge and extension for the more able children and overall improvement in the standards achieved in literacy and numeracy.

5.3 In most of the areas inspected, the quality of education provided in this school is satisfactory; the strengths outweigh areas for improvement in the provision. The inspection has identified areas for improvement in standards, learning and teaching, and leadership and management which need to be addressed if the needs of all the children are to be met more effectively. The Education and Training Inspectorate will monitor and report on the school's progress in addressing the areas for improvement.

6. THE NURSERY UNIT

6.1 The nursery opened in 2002 and is situated in the grounds of St Oliver Plunkett's Primary School.

6.2 The arrangements for the inspection of pastoral care and child protection included the opportunity for the parents and the staff to complete a confidential questionnaire prior to the inspection. A majority of the parents responded to the questionnaire and seven made additional written comments. Those who responded indicated a very high level of satisfaction with the overall provision and they recorded their appreciation of the caring and professional staff and the wide range of interesting activities provided for the children. All of the responses have been shared with the staff and the management of the school.

6.3 The quality of the arrangements for pastoral care in the nursery is very good. Among the strengths are the excellent relationships between the staff and the children and the strong value placed on the children's own ideas which promotes their confidence and self-esteem.

6.4 The nursery has very good arrangements in place for safeguarding the children. These arrangements reflect the guidance issued by DE.

6.5 The nursery gives very good attention to promoting healthy eating and physical activity. The children are provided with a healthy break and have good opportunities for energetic play.

6.6 The main strengths within the nursery's educational and pastoral provision are as follows:

- the excellent ethos built on the mutual respect between the children and the staff;
- the very stimulating and well-presented learning environment which promotes the children's curiosity, interest and independence;
- the caring and supportive staff who demonstrate skill in building on the children's own ideas and effectively promote the children's language and learning;
- the written planning which provides an effective framework for a stimulating, broad and well-balanced pre-school curriculum;
- the good to excellent opportunities for the children to learn across all areas of the pre-school curriculum. Particular strengths in the curriculum include the children's very high levels of motivation and concentration in their activities, the many good examples of creative and imaginative play, the children's interest in the natural environment and their language development; and
- the effective leadership provided by the nursery's co-ordinator in setting up and developing the overall quality of provision within the nursery.

6.7 The nursery co-ordinator is reflective in her practice and evaluates the programme regularly. The nursery has comprehensive action plans which identify relevant areas for improvement and which is incorporated well into the whole-school development plan. The staff have developed some effective methods of self-evaluation and there is evidence that the process has led to improvements in the children's learning experiences.

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

**STATISTICAL INFORMATION ON THE NURSERY UNIT IN ST OLIVER
PLUNKETT'S PRIMARY SCHOOL, TOOMEBRIDGE (303-3303)**

1. Details of Children

Number of children:	Class 1	Class 2
Attending full-time	0	0
Attending part-time	26	0
Under 3 years of age*	0	0
With a statement of SEN**	0	0
Without a statement but receiving therapy or support from other professionals for SEN	0	0
With English as an additional language	1	0

* On 1 July.

** Special Educational Needs.

Percentage qualifying under DE admission criteria 1 or 2.	11.5%
Average attendance for the previous year.	92.3%

2. Duration of Sessions

Full-time	Part-time: am	Part-time: pm
-	2½ hours	-

3. DETAILS OF STAFF

Number of:	Full-Time	Part-Time
Teachers	0	1
Nursery Assistants	0	1
Qualified Nursery Assistants	0	0

Number of: ****	
Students	0
Trainees	1

**** Total placements since September of current year

4. Parental Questionnaires

Number issued	26
Number returned	17
Number of written comments	7

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