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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

Education and Training Inspectorate

Report of a Focused Inspection

**St Patrick's Primary School
Downpatrick**

Inspected: November 2009

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In this report, proportions may be described as percentages, common fractions and in more general quantitative terms. Where more general terms are used, they should be interpreted as follows:

Almost/nearly all	-	more than 90%
Most	-	75%-90%
A majority	-	50%-74%
A significant minority	-	30%-49%
A minority	-	10%-29%
Very few/a small number	-	less than 10%

In assessing the various features of the provision, Inspectors relate their evaluations to six descriptors as set out below:

DESCRIPTOR
Outstanding
Very Good
Good
Satisfactory
Inadequate
Unsatisfactory

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 SCHOOL CONTEXT

St Patrick's Primary School is situated on St Dillon's Avenue in Downpatrick, County Down. It is an all boys' school with a co-educational Irish-medium Unit (IMU) attached. The majority of the children who attend the school come from the centre of the town. Over the past three years, the school enrolment has decreased and currently stands at 268. Approximately 24% of the children are entitled to free school meals. The school has identified almost 19% of the children as requiring additional support with aspects of their learning.

1.2 FOCUS

The inspection focused on the children's achievements and standards in literacy and numeracy, the quality of provision for learning and the quality of leadership and management. In addition, the inspection report will make reference to the contribution of information and communication technology (ICT) in promoting and supporting learning. 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 and fifteen questionnaires were issued to parents; approximately 47% of the parental questionnaires were returned to the Department of Education (DE). Twenty-nine of the returns contained additional written comments. The responses from the parental questionnaires indicated their strong satisfaction with the life and work of the school. In particular, they acknowledged the caring and supportive learning environment, the wide range of extra-curricular activities, the approachable and hard-working staff and principal and the good standing of the school in the community.

Nine teachers completed the confidential online questionnaire; four teachers included additional written comments. All of the responses were wholly positive of all aspects of the work of the school.

The governors expressed their strong support for the Principal and staff and the work of the school. In particular, they highlighted the caring and supportive ethos, the strong commitment of the Principal and teachers to the setting up and integration of the IMU within the school.

The year 6 children 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 know whom to turn to if they have any concerns regarding their work or their safety and well-being.

The Inspectorate has reported to the Principal and the chairperson of the governors the main issues emerging from the questionnaires and the discussions.

1.4 PASTORAL CARE

The quality of provision for pastoral care is very good. There are good working relationships at all levels throughout the school and suitable arrangements are in place for the reporting of any incidents that relate to the pastoral care of the children. The teachers make effective use of praise and encouragement to motivate the children, and the appropriate balance between rewards and sanctions contributes well to the very positive ethos, which is evident throughout the school. The School Council ensures that the children's views and opinions on a range of issues are sought and valued. Good use is made of the learning environment to celebrate the children's work and to record their activities and achievements. The support staff, including the classroom assistants, school secretary and the caretaker, make a valuable contribution to the life and work of the school.

1.5 CHILD PROTECTION

The school has satisfactory arrangements in place for safeguarding children. These arrangements broadly reflect the guidance issued by DE, but the following areas need to be addressed: the need to carry out a risk assessment to ensure that the doors to all teaching and interview rooms have a viewing panel; and the need to review the current code of practice in particular the arrangements for toileting and changing the children.

1.6 HEALTHY EATING AND PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

The school gives good attention to promoting healthy eating and physical activity, for example, the successful healthy breaks scheme and sporting opportunities available to the children. The area for improvement identified is the need to ensure the children have access to a source of fresh drinking water throughout the school day.

1.7 LINKS WITH PARENTS AND THE LOCAL COMMUNITY

The school has established strong links with the parents and the local community through information evenings, regular newsletters, the extended schools programme, the parent teacher association, and as a primary partner with St Patrick's Grammar School in the Northern Ireland Specialist School programme. The children's experiences are enriched through a wide variety of extra-curricular activities, which include swimming, art, music, sport, ceramics and the learning of a modern language. In addition, the children have good opportunities to participate in a variety of educational visits in the local and wider community.

2. **ACHIEVEMENTS AND STANDARDS**

2.1 LEARNING

The school environment is conducive to learning, and the classroom assistants are used well throughout the school to support both the learning and the physical needs of the children. The teachers employ an appropriate range of strategies to support the learning needs of individual children, including differentiated work and targeted special needs support for literacy and, in particular, numeracy. The children are well motivated and settle quickly to tasks and activities. During group work and paired work, they interact well with one another to share and consolidate their learning. In class discussions, they talked openly about what they were learning and recalled prior learning experiences across the curriculum that they had enjoyed. The majority of the children in each year group are responsive and confident in their learning.

The development of the learning through play programme is an important priority in the School Development Plan (SDP) and the staff have begun a review of the current programme for play, in particular, the outdoor play. The teachers need to define better the continuity and progression expected in the children's indoor play experiences in the foundation stage (FS) and key stage (KS) 1, in order to ensure that the activities provide suitable challenge and encourage the children's creativity.

2.2 ENGLISH AND LITERACY

The quality of the provision for English and literacy is good. A recent curriculum audit carried out by the Literacy Co-ordinator has provided a useful evaluation of the work in writing and she has also identified the need to update the current reading scheme. The SDP also prioritises a new, whole-school approach to phonics and training in this has already begun. The school must monitor carefully the impact this new approach will have on learning and standards.

In the FS and KS1, activities such as shared reading, 'listening corner' and effective plenary sessions enhance the children's oral skills and help develop their confidence. As they progress through the school, open-styled questioning along with paired and group activities provide increased opportunities for the children to express their views and opinions and to discuss their learning. Throughout the FS, the children in the IMU experience a programme of total immersion in the Irish language with an appropriate emphasis on developing aural and oral skills in Irish across the curriculum. English is introduced informally to the curriculum towards the end of year 3 and formally from year 4.

In the FS, the children become familiar with different forms of print and experiment with informal mark making. The children's letter formation, word building skills and knowledge of the basic conventions such as simple sentence structure are developed through shared writing activities. The effective use of practical resources such as individual whiteboards, 'have-a-go' books, word walls and spelling mats helps promote confidence and support learning. As their skills develop, the children's independent writing is promoted appropriately; by the end of KS1, most of the children can express their ideas with a length and quality of content appropriate to their ability. As they move into KS2 most of the children continue to develop and improve the quality of their writing. Information and communication technology, such as the interactive whiteboard (IWB), is used effectively to support learning; in KS2, the children are using the Internet for research purposes alongside dictionaries, atlases and thesauri. The current focus on implementing key aspects of assessment for learning such as the use of learning intentions, success criteria, self and peer assessment is impacting positively on the good quality of the written work achieved by the children across a range of curriculum areas, such as The World Around Us and science.

The children are acquiring basic reading skills through the development of phonological awareness and experiences of shared and modelled reading; the use of Big Books on the IWBs and related reading activities are helping promote initial sounds in the FS. A commercial reading scheme is usefully supplemented by group and library novels while, reading records, story sacks and reading partnership also contribute to the children's reading experience. By the end of KS1, most of the children read with increasing fluency and competence. In KS2, the children have regular opportunities to develop their reading skills through guided reading, class novels and silent reading sessions and most can read with fluency and expression.

2.3 MATHEMATICS AND NUMERACY

The quality and effectiveness of the provision for mathematics and numeracy is good. By the end of KS2, the majority of children have a secure knowledge of mathematical concepts and the performance data, held by the school, indicates that they achieve satisfactory or better standards generally in line with their ability in mathematics.

The children experience a well-planned mathematics programme which provides good progression in the statutory requirements for mathematical knowledge, understanding and skills. The planning for mathematics is of a good quality; the four-weekly plans, in particular, identify the learning intentions and focus increasingly on differentiated learning. Appropriate opportunities for connected learning occur when the mathematics is planned as part of a topic; consequently, the children are beginning to use their mathematical skills and understanding in a range of contexts. The well-planned integration of mental mathematics into all the lessons provides the children with many opportunities to develop flexible mathematical thinking skills and the appropriate use of mathematical vocabulary. The children use a good range of practical resources to develop their understanding of number, measures, shape, and handling data. In the best practice, the children reinforce their mathematical learning effectively through well-designed consolidation tasks, alongside challenging problem-solving and investigative activities. The children's level of engagement is high when appropriately challenging mathematical tasks are set, requiring the children to, for example, plan, search for and organise information and respond creatively to mathematical investigations.

The majority of teachers make effective use of ICT to support learning and teaching in mathematics. Resources and strategies are selected to introduce mathematical concepts and promote the skills of managing information and problem solving, for example, from the use of programmable devices in the early years through to a range of handling data packages at KS2. In addition, the children achieve good standards in the KS2, Council for Curriculum Examinations and Assessment ICT Accreditation scheme.

The co-ordinator has identified appropriately, through the analysis of performance data and a useful whole-school staff audit, the need for further developmental work to provide the children with more opportunities for investigative and problem-solving activities, enhanced use of ICT and individualised learning programmes to address underachievement. These proposed developments are in line with the findings of the inspection.

3. THE QUALITY OF PROVISION FOR LEARNING

3.1 PLANNING

The planning for English and mathematics provides clear guidance for the teachers and specifies a broad range of learning experiences for the children. Opportunities for assessment are identified and the appropriate resources are included. The planning also records the teachers' evaluations which inform future planning and practice. There is a good match between the planning and classroom practice.

3.2 TEACHING

The quality of the lessons observed during the inspection was always satisfactory with the majority being good or very good.

In the most effective practice, the children were well motivated and on task; the intended learning was discussed at appropriate intervals throughout the lesson to review and consolidate the children's understanding; and the planned activities matched to the abilities of the children.

In the less effective practice, there were missed opportunities for collaborative work and there was insufficient time for the children to consolidate their learning.

3.3 ASSESSMENT

The parents are kept well informed of their children's progress through parental interviews and written reports, and the school maintains information and performance data on the children's progress. The teachers have made a good start at using the results from standardised tests and DE benchmarking data to assess the level of the children's achievement in literacy and numeracy and to set realistic targets for improvement. All of the teachers mark the children's work regularly. In most 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.

3.4 IRISH-MEDIUM UNIT

The children in the IMU achieve appropriately high standards in Irish, English and mathematics. The IMU is an integral part of St Patrick's Primary School and benefits greatly from this arrangement. Two of the IMU teachers have whole-school managerial responsibilities. The work of the IMU benefits greatly from the very good leadership and management of the experienced and committed co-ordinator.

3.5 SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS

Just over 19% of the children are on the Register for Special Needs in the school; 3% have statements of special educational needs (SEN).

The special educational needs co-ordinator (SENCO) has taken appropriate professional development opportunities and she provides good quality leadership and management of the provision for special educational needs. There is appropriate differentiation and use of the individual educational plans in most lessons to meet the children's broad range of abilities. The SENCO provides well-focused withdrawal support for small groups of children; she is well prepared, supportive of the children and uses a very good range of teaching strategies to enhance the children's literacy and numeracy skills.

The SENCO has identified through the SEN action plan a range of strategies to monitor and evaluate the quality and effectiveness of the SEN provision and the inspection endorses the implementation of the action plan as a key priority to take forward.

4. LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

4.1 LEADERSHIP

The Principal provides very good leadership and management of the school. He has a broad and strategic vision for the school, based on a set of agreed values which are centered on the educational and welfare needs of all the children. During his 14 years in post, he has overseen the successful setting up and integration of the IMU within the school, and he has worked hard to empower teachers to lead and coordinate learning areas within the curriculum.

4.2 PLANNING FOR IMPROVEMENT

A culture of self-evaluation is starting to develop well with policies and action plans in literacy and numeracy supporting the process of school improvement. It will be important that the results from monitoring classroom practice are rigorously evaluated and used to inform planning, and raise standards further. The SDP meets fully the requirements of the DE School Development Planning Regulations and Guidance 2005/19.

4.3 RESOURCES, FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT AND GOVERNANCE

The governors are well informed about the strategic planning and the financial management of the school. They provide good support for the Principal and the teachers to implement the SDP.

5. CONCLUSION

5.1 The strengths of the school include:

- the sense of community and the inclusive ethos of the school;
- the quality of the teaching which was good or very good in the majority of lessons observed;
- the good provision for children with special educational needs;
- the good standards achieved in literacy by the end of key stage 2; and
- the very good leadership provided by the Principal.

The area for improvement is the need to:

- develop further roles of the co-ordinators to provide a sharper focus on monitoring and evaluating the quality of teaching and learning to help raise further the standards, particularly in numeracy.

5.2 In the areas inspected, the quality of education provided in this school is good. The school has important strengths in most of its educational and pastoral provision. The inspection has identified an area for improvement which the school has demonstrated the capacity to address. The Education and Training Inspectorate will monitor the school's progress on the areas for improvement.

ACCOMMODATION

The school needs to carry out a risk assessment to ensure that the doors to all teaching and interview rooms have viewing panels.

The school needs to carry out a risk assessment on the access and security arrangements of the school building and annexes in order to ensure the safety of the children and staff at all times.

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