



*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**



INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

Education and Training Inspectorate

Report of a Focused Inspection

**Vere Foster Primary School
Belfast**

Inspected: March 2009

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BASIC INFORMATION SHEET (BIS) - PRIMARY SCHOOLS

- A. i. **School: Vere Foster Primary School** iii. **Date of Inspection: W/B 30/03/2009**
- ii. **School Reference Number: 101-0321** iv. **Nature of Inspection: Focused**

B.

School Year	2004/05	2005/06	2006/07	2007/08	2008/09
Year 1 Intake	10	13	10	8	6
Enrolments					
Primary	122	122	102	81	57
Reception	-	-	-	-	-
Nursery Class/Classes	-	-	-	-	-
Special Unit	-	-	-	-	-

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): 90.9%

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) | 4 | |
| | ii. | PTR (Pupil/Teacher Ratio): | 14.25 | NI PTR: 20.8 |
| | iii. | Average Class Size: | 14 | |
| | iv. | Class Size (Range): | 11 to 20 | |
| | v. | Ancillary Support:
Number of Hours Per Week : | | |
| | | i. | Clerical support: | 30 hours |
| | | ii. | Official Making A Good
Start Support: | 10 hours |
| | | iii. | Additional hours of other
classroom assistant support: | 50 hours |
| | vi. | Percentage of children with statements of special educational needs: | 1% | |
| | vii. | Total percentage of children on the Special Needs Register: | 21% | |
| | viii. | Number of children who are not of statutory school age: | 0 | |
| | ix. | Number of families in school: | 49 | |
| | x. | Percentage of children entitled to free school meals: | 77% | |

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 SCHOOL CONTEXT

Vere Foster Primary School is situated in Moyard Parade, close to the Springfield Road in west Belfast. The enrolment of the school has dropped dramatically since 2005/06 when 122 children attended the school. The current enrolment is 57 children. The community which the school serves has experienced a period of violence and uncertainty in the last two years. This unrest had a very high profile and has impinged significantly on the school. The children come from the surrounding housing estate; nearly 80% are entitled to take free school meals. The school has identified approximately 20% of the children as having special educational needs (SEN).

1.2 FOCUS

The inspection focused on the quality of the work in English / literacy and mathematics and the use of information and communication technology (ICT) in promoting and supporting learning and teaching in English / literacy and mathematics. The inspection team also evaluated the school's arrangements for Pastoral Care, including Child Protection and the implementation of the 'Healthy Food in Schools' initiative.

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 and members of the Pupil Council. Forty nine questionnaires were issued to parents and approximately 60% of these were returned to the Department of Education (DE). Fourteen returns contained additional written comments. Nearly all of the responses indicated a high level of satisfaction with the provision in the school. In particular, the parents highlighted the caring, happy learning environment and the approachability of the Principal and the staff. Four teachers completed the online questionnaire. All the responses were highly supportive of the work of the school.

The governors spoke very positively about the caring, inclusive ethos of the school and the high quality of the pastoral care. They also discussed the challenges facing the school due to the falling enrolment. The children talked with enthusiasm about their school; they reported that they feel happy and safe in the school, and that they know who to speak to if they have any concerns. An analysis of the questionnaires and the written comments made by the parents and the staff were shared with the Principal and the governors.

1.4 PASTORAL CARE

The quality of provision for pastoral care is very good. The Principal and the staff are dedicated to the children in their care. The children are well-mannered and friendly, and respond well to the staff's expectations of behaviour. The teachers make good use of praise and encouragement to motivate the children; the appropriate balance between rewards and sanctions contributes well to the positive ethos, which is evident throughout the school. The classroom assistants, office staff, caretaker and other ancillary staff contribute significantly to promoting and maintaining a pleasant working environment for the children.

1.5 CHILD PROTECTION

The school has satisfactory arrangements in place for safeguarding children. These arrangements broadly reflect the guidance issued by DE, although the school needs to ensure that all documentation reflects accurately the procedures put in place.

1.6 HEALTH AND WELL-BEING

The school gives good attention to promoting healthy eating and physical activity, for example, the fruit tasting event and the daily discussions about health topics. The area for improvement identified is the need to monitor formally, the whole-school healthy eating programmes.

1.7 LINKS WITH PARENTS AND OTHERS

The Principal and staff have developed effective links with the parents in supporting the needs of their children. The children's learning experiences are further enriched through the Extended Schools programme, extra-curricular activities, educational visits, visitors to the school and very strong links with the local community.

2. ACHIEVEMENTS AND STANDARDS

2.1 LEARNING

The children settle quickly to work and are attentive. In the most effective practice observed during the inspection, the children were encouraged to take time to think, to ask questions and to talk about their learning. These children respond to questions with confidence. In all year groups, the children are provided with enjoyable opportunities to interact with each other in group and paired work. When appropriately challenged, the children are engaged in their learning.

2.2 ENGLISH AND LITERACY

The quality of provision for English and literacy is satisfactory. As the school has identified, the standards achieved by the children in literacy need to improve. As a result, the school is participating in the Belfast Education and Library Board's Achievement Programme and this has informed the action plans to introduce a consistent phonics programme across the school and the Communication and Education Together programme in the foundation stage.

The children are keen to talk and discuss their ideas in response to their reading and the topics studied. The good opportunities provided by the teachers for the children to work in pairs, groups and circle time are helping to promote the children's talking and listening skills. In some instances, however, the children's extended responses are limited by an over reliance on teacher-led activities.

By the end of key stage (KS) 1 the children can write in sentences and as they progress in KS2, the children's writing skills are developed further and they can write for an increasing range of purposes, including letters, reporting, instructional, imaginative and descriptive writing. The teachers are using some effective strategies to help the children with their

writing, including ICT software packages, individual whiteboards and word banks. The children require more targeted support to improve their use of basic grammar, spelling and writing conventions through a greater level of appropriate differentiation in the activities set and a sharper focus on sharing the intended learning outcomes for the written tasks.

The children are responding well to the recent introduction of the phonics programme and there is a wide range of appropriate reading material available to them. In addition, the children benefit from a well-stocked school library and the classrooms have a good range of text and written prompts to support the children's reading. The majority of children do not reach a standard of reading in line with other children of a similar age. The school needs to target, monitor and evaluate in a more robust manner the progress of individual children. The whole-school planning for literacy needs to be reviewed to ensure clearer progression in aspects of talking and listening, and reading and writing in order to meet the needs of the children currently in the school and to raise standards.

2.3 MATHEMATICS AND NUMERACY

The quality of the mathematics provision is satisfactory. The teachers plan the children's experiences using whole-school guidance that provides a broad and balanced coverage of number, shape and space, measures and handling data. The children are given opportunities to help develop their mathematical knowledge and understanding through a range of experiences using practical equipment, including programmable devices such as 'Roamer' and 'Bee Bot', and working in pairs and groups.

During the inspection, while the KS1 children demonstrated their knowledge of important ideas and concepts, for example, place value, the majority were unsure of the most effective mental mathematics strategies and were slow to demonstrate flexibility in their mathematical thinking. By the end of KS2, and as identified by the school, a majority of the children are still attaining standards in mathematics which are below the expected level of attainment for children of their age.

The co-ordinator for numeracy has a clear vision for the development of mathematics. Useful whole-school action plans have just been devised. Evidence from the school's own data, together with inspection findings, indicate a significant number of children who experience difficulties in mathematics. The staff need to evaluate all available data to enable them to identify whole-school trends and to ensure appropriate challenge for all the children in order to raise the standards the children achieve in numeracy.

3. THE QUALITY OF PROVISION FOR LEARNING

3.1 PLANNING

The teachers have recently reviewed their medium-term planning to reflect more fully the requirements of the Northern Ireland Curriculum. It is appropriate that, at the end of this planning cycle, the teachers will include an evaluation of their work to inform future teaching and learning. The daily planning helps the teachers to prepare for their lessons, and includes the intended learning outcomes and the resources to be used. Overall, the teachers need to focus more in these lessons on whether the children have achieved the intended learning outcomes.

3.2 TEACHING

Most of the teaching observed during the inspection was satisfactory. The teachers are developing a range of strategies to ensure appropriate pace and challenge, to engage all the children more actively in their learning and to encourage problem-solving and investigative activities. The teachers use effective strategies for classroom management. In about half of the lessons, the intended learning was shared with the children at the start of the lesson; the activities and experiences for the lessons were planned well and there was a good balance between individual, paired and group activities. A majority of the teachers used plenary sessions at the end of the lesson to summarise and check learning.

3.3 ASSESSMENT

The school uses a wide range of assessment procedures to monitor the children's scores in standardised and end of key stage tests. The children's work is marked regularly and the teachers' comments are positive. The school needs to implement a more consistent approach to marking for improvement, including the setting and monitoring of individual targets for the children in both literacy and numeracy. The school keeps the parents well informed about their children's progress; an individual parent / teacher meeting is held during the school year and an annual written report is prepared for parents.

3.4 SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS

Thirteen children have been identified by the school as requiring additional help with their literacy. The school makes use of a wide range of standardised tests and teachers' observations, knowledge and experience to identify the children's difficulties in literacy at an appropriately early stage. Assistance is provided for these children through withdrawal sessions delivered by a part-time SEN teacher one day each week.

The part-time SEN teacher supports the class teachers in devising individual education plans (IEPs). Useful IEPs have been drawn up for literacy; these are subject to ongoing review and to further development. The school receives beneficial multi-disciplinary support for those children requiring specialised help through, for example, St Gerard's Resource Centre, Harberton Outreach Service, Mitchell House School and the Ulidia Service.

There is a need to evaluate effectively the extent to which the SEN arrangements lead to improvements in the standards achieved by the children. There is also a need to support more effectively the children who experience difficulties in their learning in mathematics and to determine, monitor and record the progress made by these children.

4. LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

4.1 LEADERSHIP

The Principal has been in post ten years and has served the school well. She is guiding the school through a period of dramatic decline in enrolment of both children and staff. She is to be commended for her lead with the staff in trying to maintain a settled, caring and safe environment within the school for the children. It is important for the Principal to ensure, in the current context of significant change, that she is fully engaged with the staff in developing and improving standards in the learning and teaching.

4.2 PLANNING FOR IMPROVEMENT

Following an extensive school audit, an appropriate school development plan has been devised to guide the work of the school; it is compliant with School Development Plans Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2005. Appropriate action plans have been devised in literacy and numeracy. It is timely for the school, led by the Principal, to develop a more rigorous and systematic approach to monitoring and evaluation of the provision in order to achieve higher standards in literacy and numeracy and to ensure a more equitable distribution of roles and responsibilities of co-ordinators.

5. CONCLUSION

5.1 The strengths of the school include:

- the welcoming and supportive ethos which permeates the school;
- the very good quality of the provision for pastoral care;
- the friendly and well-mannered children who co-operate well with their teachers and with each other; and
- the commitment of the Principal and the staff in promoting effective links with the parents in supporting the needs of their children.

5.2 The areas for improvement include the need:

- for the Principal to work collaboratively with the staff to raise standards in both literacy and numeracy through a more rigorous and systematic approach to monitoring and evaluation; and
- to review the roles and responsibilities of staff.

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, teaching and learning and in leadership and management which need to be addressed if the needs of all the learners are to be met more effectively. The Inspectorate will monitor and report on the school's progress in addressing the areas for improvement.

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