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*The Education and Training Inspectorate -
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Education and Training Inspectorate

Report of a Follow-up Inspection

Rathcoole Primary School
Newtownabbey

January 2007

SCHOOL SUPPORT PROGRAMME (SSP) FOLLOW-UP INSPECTION OF RATHCOOLE PRIMARY SCHOOL, NEWTOWNABBEY BT37 9HF (301-0895)

The follow-up inspection in January 2006 highlighted the following strengths:

- the hard work and commitment amongst the teachers in reviewing and developing further their planning and varying their teaching approaches. At the time of the inspection the teaching was consistently good and often excellent;
- a stronger focus on matching work to the ability of the children;
- a continuing level of professional debate and a sharing of expertise among the teachers and a strong team identity involving all of the teaching and ancillary staff; in addition, it was very evident that the classroom assistants played an essential role in supporting the teachers and children;
- the effective collation, analysis and use of statistical data which was providing clear evidence of progress in the work of the children, for example, in numeracy and in reading particularly in key stage 1; and
- the good leadership and a clear commitment to school improvement by the Principal.

The inspection identified the need for improvement in the following key areas:

- to refine and embed those teaching strategies which will support effectively the differing needs and abilities within each class;
- to develop further the strategies to monitor the various initiatives and evaluate their effectiveness, particularly on teaching and learning;
- to continue the good start made in promoting mental processes in mathematics and, in time, to integrate these useful strategies more fully into normal classroom practice in teaching mathematics and, where appropriate, into other curriculum areas; and
- to continue with the strong commitment to raising the standards achieved in English and mathematics.

There was also a need for a concentrated focus on addressing a growth in the challenging behaviour of a minority of the children.

The Education and Training Inspectorate (Inspectorate) carried out a follow-up inspection on 15 January 2007.

In the interval since the last inspection visit of 2006, the following actions which have affected the work of the school have included:

- the appointment of a Vice-principal in March 2006, who has taken on key areas of responsibility to the benefit of the Principal and the staff;
- the improving stability in the staffing;
- the further adoption of useful initiatives in promoting the life and work of the school;
- a considerable investment in providing learning and teaching in small classes;
- additional improvements to the learning environment including an excellent library and an imaginative outdoor educational facility;
- the development of a multi-discipline Care Team with strong community links;
- effective training of supervisory staff and others in promoting positive behaviour and in encouraging beneficial and imaginative playground activities; and
- the loss of a reading recovery teacher.

The Principal and the staff continue to demonstrate their commitment to a relevant agenda for whole-school improvement through reviewing and developing further their planning and teaching approaches to cater for the needs of all of the children. The teaching observed was consistently good and often excellent.

Important improvements since the last inspection in January 2006 include:

- in both literacy and mathematics, the adoption of a range of useful initiatives to promote higher standards in the work of the children;
- the introduction of small classes, which is having a very positive impact on learning, teaching and classroom management;
- the continuing development of a strong team identity involving all of the teaching and ancillary staff; and
- a continuing focus and commitment to the collection, collation, analysis and use of quantitative data to provide clear evidence of progress in the work of the children.

A number of important areas for development were discussed and agreed with the school, including the need to continue to:

- develop teaching strategies which will support the differing needs and abilities within each class;
- develop stronger pastoral and curricular links with parents and the local community;
- use quantitative and qualitative data and other evidence to demonstrate improvement and to assist in setting realistic targets;
- develop strategies to monitor the various initiatives and evaluate their effectiveness, particularly on teaching and learning;
- develop more fully the role of the co-ordinators including a review of the roles and responsibilities within the school; and
- retain and extend the focus on raising standards in English and mathematics and to promote more fully independence and creativity in the work of the children.

From January 2005, the school has continued to benefit from the good support of the link officer and other members of the Curriculum and Advisory Support Service (CASS) of the North-Eastern Education and Library Board. The school, however, still requires sustained financial and advisory support to enable it to continue to progress and to realise its action plans.

Given the support to date and the good work which has taken place, the school is now better placed to promote a culture of self-evaluation.

The school has made good progress in its agenda for improvement under the SSP. The Inspectorate will continue to monitor the work of the school and report on its progress.

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