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Education and Training Inspectorate

Report of a Follow-up Inspection

**The Preparatory Department, Dalriada School
Ballymoney**

February 2008

FOLLOW-UP TO THE INSPECTION OF THE PREPARATORY DEPARTMENT, DALRIADA SCHOOL, BALLYMONEY, CO ANTRIM BT53 6BL (362-0012)

The focused inspection in February 2006 highlighted strengths in the ethos of the school and the good working relationships at all levels; the well-behaved, confident and articulate children; the children's disposition to learning; the dedication and commitment of the teachers; the good quality of the teaching observed; the high quality of the pre-school provision; the work of the numeracy and information and communication technology co-ordinators; the Head of the Preparatory Department's effective leadership; the wide range of extra-curricular activities which enhances the children's learning; the effective use made of the grammar school facilities; and the strong support which the school receives from the Board of Governors and the parents.

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

- the further development of strategies to monitor and evaluate the quality of the learning and teaching; and
- the further development of investigative approaches to teaching mathematics.

In the interval since the inspection, the following action which affects the work of the school has taken place:

- the appointment of a new Head of the Preparatory Department;
- the establishment of appropriate and effective monitoring and evaluation strategies applicable to the context of the Preparatory Department; this process has been achieved through the Head of the Preparatory Department's commitment to developing a culture of reflective practice;
- the development of the role of the mathematics co-ordinator to evaluate and improve the quality of the children's learning experiences;
- the staff's significant focus on promoting and developing the children's learning opportunities through investigative mathematics as a consequence of an appropriate audit pertaining to the teaching strategies, planning and the mathematics resources;
- the high quality advice, guidance and support provided by the North-Eastern Education and Library Board's Curriculum Advisory and Support Service aligned with the school's mathematics co-ordinator to develop the staff's confidence and competences in mathematics; and
- the development of in-service training, led by the Head of the Preparatory Department and the mathematics co-ordinator, which focused on the effective use and analysis of performance data by staff.

The Education and Training Inspectorate (Inspectorate) carried out a monitoring visit and a follow-up inspection on 22 February 2008. The school's development plan has been adjusted in light of the inspection findings.

The following are the most important improvements since the focused inspection:

- the collegial approach to planning and improvement that the highly committed staff continue to develop under the effective leadership of the new Head of the Preparatory Department, with valued support from the school's management team and the governors;

- the development of the role-model of curricular leadership through the work led effectively by the mathematics co-ordinator;
- the clear identification of mathematics investigations and the practical resources that the children will be using made explicit in the teachers' planning;
- the consistent organisation of mathematics lessons to involve the children more, to promote collaborative and investigative learning and to allow more opportunities for the extended use of mathematical language;
- the effective dissemination of strategies to staff to promote good quality investigative mathematics;
- the development of procedures to monitor and evaluate the children's experiences in mathematics;
- the effective use of quantitative and qualitative data and other evidence to demonstrate improvement and to assist in the setting of realistic targets for continuing improvement; and
- the excellent quality of the lessons, evaluated during the follow-up inspection visit, which promote successfully the children's opportunities for learning through collaborative and investigative activities in mathematics.

Since the focused inspection, the school evaluated rigorously the progress made in the areas for improvement identified in the original inspection.

The promotion of a self-evaluative culture throughout the follow-up inspection period contributed significantly to the improvements made, and helped the school identify appropriately its priorities for future development. The inspection confirms that, through effective self-evaluation, the school has demonstrated clear evidence of improvement. Accordingly, the Inspectorate recommends that the processes for self-evaluation now in place are maintained.

Excellent progress has been made in the areas for improvement identified during the original inspection. The educational and pastoral needs of the learners are well met. The parents and broader community can have confidence in the effectiveness of the school's response to the findings of the inspection and its capacity for sustained self-improvement.

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