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Education and Training Inspectorate

Report of a Short Inspection

Holy Child Primary School and Nursery Unit
Belfast

Inspected: May 2009

HOLY CHILD PRIMARY SCHOOL AND NURSERY UNIT, BELFAST, BT11 8JF (103-6576)

Holy Child Primary School is situated in the parish of St Agnes in Andersontown, West Belfast. The school has a single full-time nursery unit attached to it. The enrolment in the primary school has remained steady over the last two years and is currently 492; in addition, 28 children attend the nursery unit. At the time of the inspection, approximately 24% of the children in the primary school and 25% in the nursery unit were entitled to free school meals. Approximately 26% of the children in the primary school and 8% in the Nursery unit were on the Special Educational Needs Register.

The arrangements for the inspection included the opportunity for the parents and the teaching staff to complete a confidential questionnaire prior to the inspection. Of the 105 questionnaires issued to the parents in the primary school 37 (35%) were returned to the Department of Education, including 18 which contained an additional written comment. Almost all of the parental questionnaires and written responses indicated exceptionally high levels of satisfaction with all aspects of school life; reference was made to the high quality of education which the children receive, the approachable and dedicated staff, the wide-ranging extra-curricular programme available, the good links established with parents and the extensive contribution which the school makes to the local community. The very few issues raised were discussed with the Principal. Forty-eight per cent of the teachers responded to the teacher questionnaire and their responses were mostly wholly positive, citing, in particular, the good levels of communication among the Principal, the senior management and the staff. In discussions, the year 6 children and members of the School Council talked enthusiastically about the opportunities that were available to them and of their appreciation of the care and commitment shown by the teachers. They know who to go to if they are concerned about their work, personal safety or well-being.

In the nursery unit, 27 questionnaires were issued to the parents; 33% were returned to DE and five contained 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; they are satisfied that the children are safe and secure and that the nursery is well thought of in the community. All of the responses have been shared with the management of the school.

The quality of the arrangements for pastoral care in the school and nursery unit is outstanding. Appropriate policies and procedures are in place, the ethos is very positive and working relationships at all levels are very good. The children are settled, confident and happy, and their behaviour is very good. This is demonstrated through the cognisance taken of the individual needs of the children in class and the inclusive and supportive ethos throughout the school and nursery. The Vice-principal with responsibility for pastoral care provides effective leadership and has developed a strong collegial approach to the provision in this area.

The school and nursery unit have very good comprehensive arrangements in place for safeguarding children. These arrangements reflect the guidance issued by the DE.

The school and nursery gives very good attention to promoting healthy eating and physical activity. The children enjoy healthy breaks and additionally the children in the nursery have regular opportunities for energetic physical play outdoors.

The strengths of the school include:

- the outstanding quality of pastoral care in the school and nursery unit, the positive ethos reflected in the children's exemplary behaviour, and the good links made with the parents and the community;
- the high quality of the teaching, which was mostly good to very good in the lessons observed and outstanding in a few lessons;
- the very good standards attained by most of the children in literacy;
- the system for early intervention for children with special educational needs; there is substantial evidence of very good progress made in improving these children's literacy skills;
- the effective use made of the process of development planning and self-evaluation to identify appropriately, in the School Development Plan, the current school priorities based on the efficient use of performance data, for example, the need to improve standards in mathematics; and
- the high quality leadership and management provided by the Principal, who is ably-supported by the Vice-principal and senior management team.

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

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

- The staff have created an attractive and stimulating learning environment for the children. Materials are thoughtfully presented to promote the children's independence and their confidence in making choices and decisions.
- The quality of the interactions between the staff and the children is consistently of a high standard; through skilful questioning and natural conversations, they stimulate and sustain the children's interest and promote co-operative and purposeful play.
- The children respond very well to the activities provided for them. During the inspection, there were many instances of co-operative, purposeful play; the interactions of the staff help to motivate the children and encourage sustained interest and concentration.
- There are very good opportunities for learning in all areas of the pre-school curriculum. There is a good emphasis on promoting the children's language development, supporting their early mathematical ideas and their understanding of the world around them.

- The staff have developed appropriate methods of planning the programme and assessing the children's development and achievement.
- Those children with special educational needs receive effective support from the staff team.

The teacher currently in charge of the nursery is a very good role model in her work with the children. The staff team is well established and very experienced, and they have a sound understanding of the pre-school curriculum. The planned programme is evaluated regularly. The staff are well-placed to take a more structured approach to development planning to help them monitor and evaluate ongoing improvement in provision and outcomes for the children.

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.

HEALTH AND SAFETY

- There is subsidence in an outer wall in the boundary of the school.
- The leaks in the roof are a cause of dampness in various rooms in the school.

ACCOMMODATION

- The paint is flaking off the walls in some areas of the school.
- The disabled access is inadequate.

Throughout the report a number of quantitative terms are used which may be interpreted as indicated below:

- More than 90% - almost/nearly all
- 75%-90% - most
- 50%-74% - a majority
- 30%-49% - a significant minority
- 10%-29% - a minority
- Less than 10% - very few/a small number.

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