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## **Education and Training Inspectorate**

### **Report of a Focused Inspection**

### **Ballinamallard Primary School and Community Nursery**

**Inspected: January 2008**

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## **1. INTRODUCTION**

1.1 Ballinamallard Primary School is situated in the village of Ballinamallard in County Fermanagh. Most of the children come from the village; a small number travel by bus from the immediate rural area. While the enrolment has remained fairly steady over the past four years, there has been a decrease during this school year; at the time of the inspection it stood at 141. Approximately 1% of the children are entitled to free school meals. The school has identified 18% of the children to be in need of additional support with aspects of their learning.

1.2 As part of the inspection process, meetings were held with the Board of Governors (governors) and a group of children in year 6. The parents' and teachers' views on aspects of the life and work of the school were sought by means of confidential questionnaires: of the 111 parental questionnaires issued, 51 (46%) were returned to the Department of Education (DE); nine included a written comment. Most of the parents' responses and comments were positive, and included references to the caring and supportive ethos and the commitment of the Principal and the staff. The majority of the teachers completed the on-line questionnaire; their responses were wholly positive; two written comments were received. The governors commented favourably on the school's arrangements to support children who experienced difficulty in aspects of their work, the Dyslexia Friendly School (DFS) accreditation and the commitment and support of the parents. The year 6 children reported that they feel safe, enjoy school and know what to do in the event of a concern. The few issues raised by parents were discussed with the Principal and the governors.

1.3 The inspection focused on English, including information and communications technology (ICT), the provision for special educational needs (SEN), and on the school's arrangements for pastoral care, including child protection. The inspection also included the quality of the provision in the school's nursery unit.

## **2. THE QUALITY OF THE CHILDREN'S WORK**

2.1 A very positive tone permeates the school. The children are well behaved and welcoming, and working relationships at all levels are excellent. The teachers have created an interesting and stimulating learning environment; displays of the children's work are of a high standard in many of the classrooms. Circulation areas have been enlivened with art work, photographs of school events, class projects and records of the children's achievements.

2.2 There is the strong emphasis on promoting the children's self-esteem and confidence; opportunities are sought regularly to acknowledge the children's efforts and successes through, for example, class reward schemes such as 'Golden Time' and class and individual awards at school assemblies. Opportunities to perform in school assemblies and plays enhance further the children's confidence and enjoyment.

2.3 The children's experiences are enriched through regular visits to places of educational interest, by visitors to the school and through participation in an after-school sports programme.

2.4 Parents are kept well-informed about general school matters through regular news-sheets. Information on the children's performance is provided through monthly report cards, a detailed annual report and by two meetings with the class teacher during the course of the year. An active parent group supports the work of the school, particularly in fund-raising activities.

2.5 The quality of the arrangements for pastoral care and child protection has important strengths. The school has procedures in place which implement the guidance outlined in the relevant DE circulars and has identified appropriately a few areas for improvement which it is currently developing. Among the strengths is the staff's commitment to providing a climate of inclusion and the opportunities afforded to the children to be involved in decision-making processes. The areas for improvement include the need to avail of appropriate Western Education and Library Board (WELB) governor training in Child Protection and Recruitment and Selection, and the need to put in place a written Code of Conduct for all staff.

2.6 The school gives very good attention to promoting health and well-being, including opportunities for healthy eating and physical activity. There are effective policies and programmes in place, such as the breakfast club, fruit days and the 'Water is Cool in School' initiative, which encourage the children to adopt healthy lifestyles. An assessment of the nature and quality of arrangements for health and well-being practices within the school should be included in the school development plan (SDP) to comply with statutory regulations.

2.7 All of the teachers prepare diligently for their work. Planning for lessons is detailed and suitably differentiated to take account of the range of abilities within each class. Intended learning outcomes are identified and used as the basis for evaluations of the effectiveness of teaching and learning; the information is used appropriately to help draw up future planning.

2.8 The teachers are hard-working and committed fully to the children's education and welfare. The quality of the teaching observed was always satisfactory, and, in the majority of occasions, was very good. In the best practice, the teaching had a brisk pace and was suitably challenging; clear connections were made to other areas of the curriculum and previous learning was systematically built upon. In the very few instances of less effective teaching, the tasks failed to stimulate the children and had limited learning opportunities.

2.9 The children generally settle well to their work and display a positive attitude to learning. They listen attentively, engage readily in discussions and respond appropriately to the teacher. The children work co-operatively in group and paired activities and are capable of sustained periods of concentrated effort in line with their age.

2.10 The school has focused significantly on teaching and learning strategies that support the requirements of the DFS accreditation. A feature of this is the teachers' awareness of the children's preferred learning styles, and the emphasis on the development of self-help skills to promote independent learning. In the lessons observed, the children were encouraged to make choices on how they recorded their written work; options included mind-mapping, rich pictures and extended prose. In addition, the children were encouraged to reflect, discuss and make connections in their learning.

2.11 The teaching of English is co-ordinated well throughout the school. A detailed programme guides the work in reading, writing and talking and listening, and effective links are made to develop the children's literacy across all areas of the curriculum. In addition, the use of resources, including ICT, is planned appropriately to enhance the children's learning experiences. The school has recently installed a number of interactive whiteboards and the teachers are becoming increasingly proficient and confident in their use. The children enjoy ICT activities and there are many examples of writing and pictorial displays created using ICT. Most classes have good library areas with a wide selection of fiction and non-fiction texts. It is appropriate that the school has identified the development of the central library as a priority.

2.12 At foundation stage (FS) the children are encouraged to develop an interest in stories and books through story times, rhymes, role-play and singing. The school has recently reviewed reading resources for the early years and has provided a range of books which encourages effective home/school liaison through shared reading activities. The teachers use a range of reading strategies, including a structured phonics programme, to develop the children's skills, and provide interesting practical opportunities for the children to use their knowledge in meaningful and enjoyable contexts. Resources such as 'Big Books' are used effectively in shared reading sessions to help develop an understanding of text and sentence structure. In key stage (KS) 1, the teachers provide structured and planned progression in reading skills to further develop fluency, word attack skills and understanding. The children are encouraged to develop a general enjoyment of books; they talk confidently about reading preferences and favourite authors. Suitable topic work is used to stimulate interest in fiction and non-fiction books. In the year 3 and 4 class, for example, as part of a topic on Owls, the teacher engaged the children in a range of very imaginative reading activities. The children's reading skills are developed progressively in KS2. Class and group novels are used effectively to develop comprehension, fluency and expression and to support learning in other curricular areas. Sources of information, including the Internet, are used to promote the children's skills in skimming and scanning text, and in general research activities such as note making. In the year 7 class, for example, a wide range of sources was used to support a detailed study of life in Kenya.

2.13 Writing skills are developed progressively throughout the school. In the FS, the children have frequent opportunities to experiment with simple mark-making through play-based activities and by recording their ideas in class writing books. They progress to the writing of simple sentences, short personalised stories and factual information linked to class topics; in year 2, for example, as part of their topic work, the children produced an interesting display about the Emperor Penguin. In KS1, the children are encouraged to write more extended texts, usually in their own words; independence is developed using a range of strategies including 'Have a go' books, word banks and topical wall displays. Children have opportunities to write in a range of genre including newspaper articles, poetry, cartoons and narrative. The teachers provide frequent opportunities for the children to work in groups and to share their writing outcomes with peers and other classes in the school. Throughout KS2, writing skills are developed further, often with the support of appropriate ICT resources, and the children are able to present their ideas and learning in a variety of forms and for a range of purposes. Work observed included letter writing, recounts, flow charts, mind maps, and instructional and creative writing. While much of the children's writing is linked effectively to class topics and involves good quality research and independent writing, there is evidence of an over-use of worksheets and textbooks for grammar and comprehension activities.

2.14 The supportive tone of the school provides a very positive environment within which the children's talking and listening skills are encouraged and developed. In play-based activities the adults interact appropriately to extend the children's vocabulary and develop their oral language and listening skills. Questioning is used effectively and children respond appropriately and enthusiastically. Frequent opportunities are provided for the children to work in groups and pairs, where they express ideas with confidence and clarity, and listen to, and respect, the views of others. Plenary sessions are used effectively to provide opportunities for children to verbally share and reflect on their learning experiences. Overall, the children's talking and listening skills are very good and most make satisfactory progress in reading and writing, and attain standards generally in line with their ability. The standard of presentation and handwriting is good.

2.15 Approximately 18% of the children have been identified as requiring additional help with their learning. A clear policy guides this work and well-established procedures are in place to identify and support children with learning needs. Detailed individual education plans have been drawn up, including an input from the child and a parent; and identify, in the main, appropriate short-term targets for improvement. While additional help is provided mostly in class through targeted teaching, there are afternoon withdrawal sessions for some of the children. In the sessions observed, the teachers provided valuable support, including multi-sensory approaches, to promote the children's understanding. While targets are generally well focused, some children with additional needs would benefit from more specific target-setting to ensure there is a closer match between provision and their particular needs. A feature of the overall arrangements is the very effective contribution of the school's support staff. A small number of children receive helpful support from the WELB peripatetic service.

2.16 The teachers mark the children's work conscientiously, often adding positive comments or merit stickers. In the best practice, advice on how work can be improved is noted on the children's efforts; this practice should be disseminated across the school. Samples of the children's work and records of their attainments are maintained and updated regularly. Standardised test performance data is collected in most classes; while this information is used to assess individual progress, it is appropriate that the school has identified the need to make greater use of the data in order to help monitor the overall standards the children attain, and to provide baselines for improvement. There is good liaison between the nursery unit and the primary school; the transition arrangements are very effective.

2.17 The Principal has been in post for 21 years and sets the tone for the school's very caring and inclusive ethos. He has overseen a range of important curricular and pastoral initiatives and has engendered the clear sense of team-work and collegiality that is evident across the school. He is very ably supported in his work by the Vice-principal.

2.18 The SDP and related action plans set out a number of whole-school priorities, including the further development of monitoring and evaluating strategies, additional training in the use of interactive whiteboards and the ongoing implementation of the revised curriculum. It is necessary to review the existing SDP so that it complies fully with the requirements of the relevant DE regulations; in particular, there is a need to identify targets for improvement in the standards the children attain.

2.19 The accommodation is well maintained and the standard of caretaking is very good.

### 3. CONCLUSION

3.1 The strengths of the school include:

- the very good behaviour of the children and their positive attitude to learning;
- the excellent relationships throughout the school and the strong sense of collegiality amongst the staff;
- the commitment of the Principal and teachers to the all-round development of the children;
- the overall high standard of the teaching observed;
- the recognition and response to the children's individual learning styles, including accreditation as a Dyslexia Friendly School; and
- the significant contribution of the support staff to the children's well being.

3.2 Areas for improvement:

- to need to make more effective use of performance data to monitor more closely the standards the children attain; and
- the need to review the SDP in order to comply fully with The Education (School Development Plans) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2005.

3.3 In the areas inspected, the school has important strengths in most of its educational and pastoral provision. The inspection has identified minor areas for improvement which the school has the capacity to address.

The school's progress on the areas for improvement will be followed-up by monitoring visits, conducted by the District Inspector.



#### 4. **BALLINMALLARD COMMUNITY NURSERY**

4.1 The nursery unit opened in 2001 in mobile accommodation, and is now situated in purpose-built premises within the grounds of Ballinamallard Primary School. The children come mainly from the surrounding rural area.

4.2 The parents and staff were given the opportunity to express their views about the nursery through the inspection questionnaires. The responses have been taken into account as part of the inspection and any issues raised have been shared with the staff. Those parents who responded expressed high levels of satisfaction with the work of the nursery.

4.3 The quality of the arrangements for pastoral care and child protection is very good. The nursery has appropriate policies and procedures for child protection that comply with Department of Education Circulars and guidance. The inspection evidence indicates that these policies and procedures are implemented effectively and consistently to safeguard the children.

4.4 The nursery gives very good attention to promoting healthy eating and physical activity, and has effective policies and programmes in place to encourage the children to adopt healthy lifestyles.

4.5 **The main strengths within the nursery's educational and pastoral provision are as follows.**

- The unit has a very positive ethos based on good working relationships at all levels. The staff are caring and supportive; the children show high levels of confidence, independence and self-esteem. The children respond well to the staff's expectations and their behaviour is very good.
- The staff have created an attractive and stimulating learning environment, both indoors and in the outdoor play area. The children's work is displayed throughout the playroom and good use is made of all the space available to provide appropriate areas for play. Exciting interest areas have been created to extend the children's imagination and thinking skills.
- The daily session is organised very effectively. Transitions are smooth and there is a suitable balance of free play and adult-led group activities.
- The staff interact skilfully with the children and help promote settled, co-operative and purposeful play. There are very good opportunities for learning across all areas of the pre-school curriculum.
- Appropriate systems of planning have been developed which guide the staff in their day-to-day work with the children; the staff make good use of photographs and observations to monitor and record the children's experiences.
- The staff have identified children who require additional support, particularly in relation to speech and language difficulties. They liaise effectively with the parents and other professional agencies and have received valuable advice from the speech therapist within the local SureStart project.

4.6 The teacher in charge of the nursery provides a very good role-model in her work with the children. She manages the nursery effectively and demonstrates a reflective approach to her work. The nursery has a sound development plan which identifies appropriate areas for review and development. There is a strong sense of team-spirit and enthusiasm among the staff. They have begun to evaluate aspects of the programme, including the methods used to assess and record the children's learning, and are well-placed to continue this self-evaluative approach to ongoing improvement.

4.7 The quality of education provided in this nursery is very good. The educational and pastoral needs of the children are being well met. The parents can have confidence in the nursery's capacity for sustained self-improvement.

No follow-up inspection is required.

## STATISTICAL INFORMATION ON BALLINAMALLARD COMMUNITY NURSERY

### 1. Details of Children

<b>Number of children:</b>	<b>Class 1</b>	<b>Class 2</b>
Attending full-time	0	0
Attending part-time	26	0
Under 3 years of age*	8	0
With statement of SEN**	0	0
At CoP stages 3 or 4***	0	0
At CoP stages 1 or 2***	5	0
With English as an additional language	0	0

\* On 1 July.

\*\* Special Educational Needs.

\*\*\* The stages refer to those set out in the Code of Practice for the Identification and Assessment of Special Educational Needs.

Percentage qualifying under DE admission criteria 1 or 2.	0%
Average attendance for the previous year.	93.4%

### 2. Duration of Sessions

<b>Full-time</b>	<b>Part-time: am</b>	<b>Part-time: pm</b>
-	2½ hours	-

### 3. Details of Staff

<b>Number of:</b>	<b>Full-Time</b>	<b>Part-Time</b>
Teachers	0	1
Nursery Assistants	0	0
Qualified Nursery Assistants	0	1.75

<b>Number of: ****</b>	
Students	1
Trainees	2

\*\*\*\* Total placements since September of current year

### 4. Parental Questionnaires

Number issued	26
Percentage returned	50%
Number of written comments	4

## **APPENDIX**

### **HEALTH AND SAFETY (PRIMARY SCHOOL)**

- The section of the rear pathway which traverses a culvert is steep and hazardous, particularly in icy conditions.

### **HEALTH AND SAFETY (NURSERY UNIT)**

- The outdoor play area surrounds the nursery building on two sides and requires high levels of adult supervision. The staff report that, at times, the safe management of this area limits the quality of the children's play.

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