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INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

Education and Training Inspectorate

Report of a Focused Inspection

**Bunscoil Bheanna Boirche
Castlewellan**

Inspected: February 2008

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Bunscoil Bheanna Boirche, a co-educational, Irish-medium primary school, was first established in 1998 and achieved grant-aided status in 2002. It is situated in temporary accommodation in Castlewellan Community Hall and in adjacent temporary mobile classrooms. The school has a wide rural catchment area. There are ten children in year 1 and a total enrolment of 51. Seven children are entitled to free school meals.

1.2 The inspection focused on the quality of work in mathematics including information and communication technology (ICT), the effectiveness of the provision for special educational needs (SEN), and the school's arrangements for Pastoral Care including Child Protection.

1.3 As part of the inspection process, meetings were held with members of the Board of Governors (governors), and with the children in years 6 and 7. The parents' views on aspects of the life and work of the school were also sought by means of a questionnaire. Thirty-three questionnaires were sent to parents by the school; 16 of these were returned to the Department of Education (DE) of which eight contained written comments. Most of the comments in the questionnaires were very positive. The few matters raised by the parents in the questionnaires were discussed with the Principal and the governors. The parents commented favourably on the commitment of the Principal and staff to promoting a safe and harmonious learning environment for all the children. The governors endorsed strongly the work of the school and outlined their role in the management of the school. They expressed a very high degree of satisfaction with the work of the Principal and the staff. The children spoke very favourably about their experiences in school; they indicated that they could get help if required and were content that staff deal sympathetically with their needs. The teachers also completed confidential questionnaires; their responses were highly supportive of the school's management and all aspects of the life and work of the school.

2. THE QUALITY OF THE CHILDREN'S WORK

2.1 The quality of the working relationships between the teachers and the children is, in most instances, very good. There is a strong team spirit among the staff; the teachers work well together and there is a close sense of community. Most of the children respond positively and work with high levels of motivation and interest. The behaviour of a number of children is challenging and disruptive; the school has usefully sought the support of outside agencies in order to deal more effectively with this issue. Communication with the parents is good.

2.2 The school has established effective links, including cross-community links, with a range of other schools in the locality and beyond, and the children benefit greatly from the associated activities. The children participate regularly in the various competitions of Feis an Dúin.

2.3 The quality of the arrangements for pastoral care and child protection has 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 implementing. Among the strengths are:

- the quality of the working relationships throughout the school;

- the very caring and supportive ethos; and
- the high priority given to the health and well-being of the staff and children.

2.4 The few areas for improvement identified include the need to:

- review the anti-bullying policy and procedures consulting further with the children and parents; and
- agree and implement a code of conduct for staff.

2.5 The school's programme for the promotion of health and well-being has important strengths. Attention is paid to the development and implementation of healthy eating and physical activity programmes, for example fruit parties, healthy breaks and access to drinking water, which encourage the children to adopt healthy lifestyles. The few areas for improvement identified include the need to explore opportunities to formalise monitoring and evaluation arrangements to improve the quality of provision and to consider mechanisms to consult with the whole-school community to get evaluative feedback on the school's healthy eating programme.

2.6 The teachers are hard-working and very committed to the children's learning and development. They have adopted a six-weekly planning format. There is a need for the teachers to work together to agree a shared approach to planning encompassing curricular content and the target language, ensuring consolidation and progression and catering for the full range of ages and abilities in each class to meet the individual needs of all the children. In addition, specific learning outcomes should be identified and the full learning potential of all activities and resources needs to be explored in more detail to give clear direction for teaching, learning and assessment. Evaluations need to focus more clearly on what children have learned and they should be used to guide future planning.

2.7 The teaching in a majority of the lessons observed was sound and on occasions it was good; in a significant minority of lessons, however, the quality and effectiveness of the teaching was weak and at times unsatisfactory. In the most effective practice the lessons were well planned, learning outcomes were clearly identified, shared with the children at the beginning of the lesson and returned to at the end. These lessons were conducted with an appropriate degree of pace, teachers employed a range of whole-class, group and individual approaches and the progress made was evaluated during a plenary session at the end. In the less effective lessons observed, the planning lacked detail, the teaching lacked pace, the children had limited opportunities for independent work and, at times, they were inattentive and off task. The teachers need to develop further the range of teaching approaches used to meet more fully the needs of all the children.

2.8 The teachers mark the children's work conscientiously and there are a few good examples of thorough marking for improvement; this good practice is inconsistent and at an early stage of development across the school. The school has usefully begun to use a range of assessment information to support their evaluations of the children's progress. The use of teacher assessment and external assessment information should be extended and used more effectively to monitor and evaluate the children's progress and inform planning to bring about improvement.

2.9 While a useful start has been made to providing some activities to promote learning through play, currently this aspect of the provision is under-developed. Many of the activities are limited in scope, lack suitable challenge and do not provide adequate progression in the children's skills. The staff have appropriately identified the need to develop this important aspect of the curriculum. Appropriate support and guidance is necessary to ensure that a broad and balanced programme of play is provided throughout the foundation stage and key stage (KS) 1.

2.10 A whole-school mathematics programme is being developed. Currently, the teachers plan individually for their own classes, using a range of resources including a commercial scheme. There is a need for the school to develop a whole-school scheme to promote progression across the year groups in all areas of mathematics. In both key stages the teachers are placing a good emphasis on mental and practical mathematics.

2.11 At KS1, in the best practice observed, practical activities consolidated the children's learning in number, shape, and data-handling. In addition, the children were given opportunities to demonstrate a good development of mathematical language. The good pace of one lesson, for example, enabled the children to record information and construct graphs using a number of computer programs. In a small number of lessons, the learning outcomes were unclear and the teaching approaches did not promote sufficient learning for all of the children. At KS2, the children enjoy the mental mathematics activities, they have a good range of mathematical experiences and are confident to talk about their work and explain their mental processes. By the end of KS2, most of the children reach satisfactory to good standards in line with their abilities.

2.12 The teachers recognise the need to provide more opportunities for problem-solving and investigation in mathematics and some already usefully set 'problems of the week' for their classes. The inspection would endorse the need to provide additional opportunities for all children to apply their mathematical skills in more unfamiliar and challenging situations and for the teachers to promote more independent learning through the use of a wider range of teaching approaches.

2.13 The development of ICT is at an early stage. Some of the teachers use ICT to organise their planning, and the children use programmes to consolidate their learning in mathematics. The newly appointed co-ordinator has identified clearly the need to develop further the teachers' skills and confidence, to provide more opportunities for the children to use ICT and to enter the children for the Information Technology Accreditation Scheme at KS2 organised by the Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment. The inspection would concur with these areas for development.

2.14 The school has identified 10% of the children as having special educational needs. The children are identified at an early stage by the staff who monitor their progress closely. The special educational needs co-ordinator (SENCO) works with the staff and parents to develop and review education plans, the majority of which are appropriate. There is a need to ensure that the targets and teaching approaches identified on the education plans to support

the children's learning are always defined clearly. In the main, class teachers have responsibility for meeting the needs of all children within their own classes; classroom assistants also provide useful in-class support. The further development of baseline assessment would allow more accurate diagnosis and monitoring of the children's needs and help to evaluate the progress which the children make.

2.15 The Principal is in her fifth year in post. She is fully committed to the life and work of the school and her concern and care for the children and the staff are evident. Her duties are excessive. She has responsibility for teaching a class and for co-ordinating SEN, numeracy and pastoral care. In addition, she is the designated teacher and teacher tutor. She is usually released one day a week to deal with leadership, management and administrative duties. Too often, however, this time is spent on educational activities outside the school. There is an urgent need to review the roles and responsibilities of all teachers and to agree the leadership and management priorities of the school.

2.16 The current School Development Plan (SDP) does not address the needs of the school and does not comply fully with the requirements of the School Development Plans Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2005. The school needs to review the SDP in light of the inspection findings, and focus on short- to mid-term priorities for development that will guide the work of the school more strategically. All staff and the governors need to be involved in this process of identifying the key priority areas for development. Appropriate action plans should be prepared, success criteria identified, and clear strategies to monitor and evaluate progress agreed and implemented.

2.17 The staff need to agree and implement effective systems to monitor and evaluate the quality of the school's provision at all levels, to inform planning and to promote continuing improvement.

3. CONCLUSION

3.1 The strengths of the school include:

- the welcoming, friendly ethos;
- the very good behaviour of most of the children;
- the dedication of the Principal and the staff to the children and the school;
- the school's commitment to promoting health and well-being among the children;
- the range of effective links with other schools; and
- the dedication of the governors and parents to the life and work of the school.

3.2 The areas for improvement include the need:

- to develop more detailed whole-school planning, outlining the intended learning, ensuring consolidation and progression, and addressing the needs of the full range of ages and abilities in each class;

- to review the SDP in light of the inspection findings to guide the work of the school more strategically; and
- to establish effective systems to monitor and evaluate the quality of the school's provision in order to promote continuing improvement.

3.3 In the areas inspected, the school has some strengths in its educational and pastoral provision. The inspection has identified important areas for improvement, which need to be addressed promptly if the school is to meet effectively the needs of all the learners.

3.4 The Education and Training Inspectorate will monitor and report on the school's progress in addressing these areas for improvement.

HEALTH AND SAFETY

- There are a number of classrooms without clear visual access.
- Access arrangements to the main building should be reviewed to ensure the safety of the children.

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