

eti

*The Education and Training Inspectorate -
Promoting Improvement*



Providing Inspection Services for
Department of Education
Department for Employment and Learning
Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure



INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

Education and Training Inspectorate

Report of a Focused Inspection

**Bunscoil Cholmcille and Naíscoil Dhoire
Derry**

Inspected: January 2009

CONTENTS

Section		Page
	STATISTICAL INFORMATION (BUNSCOIL CHOLMCILLE)	
1.	INTRODUCTION	1
2.	ACHIEVEMENTS AND STANDARDS	2
3.	THE QUALITY OF PROVISION FOR LEARNING	4
4.	LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT	6
5.	CONCLUSION	7
6.	NAÍScoil DHOIRE	9
	STATISTICAL INFORMATION (NAÍScoil DHOIRE)	
	APPENDIX	

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 SCHOOL CONTEXT

Bunscoil Cholmcille is a maintained Irish-medium primary school situated in temporary accommodation adjacent to Steelstown Primary School, Derry. The children come from a very wide catchment covering all areas of the city and beyond. The school's enrolment has fallen from a maximum of 228 in 1998 to its current figure of 135 children. Almost 41% of the children are entitled to free school meals. Approximately 26% of the children are on the school's special educational needs register.

1.2 FOCUS

The inspection focused on the quality of the work in Irish, English and literacy, and mathematics and numeracy, including the contribution of information and communication technology (ICT) and the arrangements for pastoral care and child protection in promoting and supporting the learning and teaching in these areas.

1.3 THE VIEWS OF THE PARENTS, TEACHERS, GOVERNORS AND CHILDREN

The arrangements for the inspection included the opportunity for the parents and the teaching staff to complete a confidential questionnaire prior to inspection as well as meetings with representatives from the Board of Governors (governors), and a group of year 6 children.

One hundred and thirty-three questionnaires were issued to parents; 17% were returned to the Department of Education (DE) and 12 contained additional written comments. The responses from the questionnaires indicated strong satisfaction with the work of the school. The small number of issues raised was discussed with the Principal and the governors.

Four of the teaching staff responded to the online questionnaire; their responses were highly supportive of the school's management and all aspects of the life and work of the school.

The governors discussed their involvement in the life and work of the school. They appreciate the hard-work of the staff and their commitment to the school and the children. They praised the good behaviour of the children but raised concern about the poor accommodation and their role in effecting improvement.

The children spoke very favourably about their experiences in school. They reported that they feel happy and secure, and indicated that they are aware of what to do if they have any concerns about their care and well-being.

1.4 PASTORAL CARE

The quality of the arrangements for pastoral care in the school is very good. The school has a caring, supportive atmosphere with a distinctive ethos based on immersion in the Irish language. The children are well behaved and enthusiastic; they are friendly towards visitors and eager to talk about their work. They co-operate respectfully with the staff and generally settle quickly to work. School routines are well established and ordered.

1.5 CHILD PROTECTION

The school has satisfactory arrangements in place for safeguarding the children. The arrangements broadly reflect the guidance issued by DE but the following area needs to be addressed:

- the school should ensure that a designated member of the Board of Governors receives formal training in Child Protection as a matter of urgency.

1.6 HEALTHY EATING AND PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

The school gives good attention to promoting healthy eating and physical activity including for example, the promotion of daily fruit snacks for break and lunch, encouragement for the children to bring bottles of water into class and the provision for regular physical outdoor activity.

1.7 LINKS WITH PARENTS

The school has produced a number of resources across the curriculum to support parents playing their proper role in the children's education. Annual meetings and written reports keep parents informed of their children's progress. The school produces a helpful newsletter which should be issued more regularly. The Principal reported that there are plans to re-establish a Parent Teachers Association. It is the policy of the school's governors to conduct all business through the medium of Irish and the result is that very few of the parents are able to become involved in the work of the school at governor level.

1.8 OTHER LINKS

The school has some links with other schools especially in the context of Extended School activities but there are few meaningful links with other Irish-medium or English-medium schools. The after-school activities provided for the children are limited. The budget allocation for Extended Schools provision is only having a limited impact on the range of additional experiences available to the children. The children would benefit from the more active involvement of the wider community in the school's provision.

2. ACHIEVEMENTS AND STANDARDS

2.1 LEARNING

An important strength of the school is the positive attitude of the children toward their learning and the enjoyment they demonstrate in the activities planned for them.

2.2 IRISH, ENGLISH AND LITERACY

The teachers provide a literacy and language rich environment for the children. The quality and effectiveness of the provision for Irish, English and literacy is good. By year 7 a majority of the children are attaining standards in Irish and English that are in line with their age and ability. The standard of the children's spoken Irish by the end of key stage (KS) 2 is very good.

The school appropriately places great emphasis on the children's acquisition of Irish in the foundation stage (FS) and KS1. They celebrate the efforts made by children and work hard to promote a positive attitude towards the use of Irish among them. English is introduced informally during year 3 and formally in year 4. The children in year 4 and KS2 are confident and articulate speakers of Irish and English; they listen well to directions and are able to explain their work and justify decisions and opinions.

Reading in Irish is taught systematically in the FS and KS1 using the Sraith Loch Laoi, Dréimire and Duilleoga series. In KS2 levelled commercial readers are used supplemented increasingly by other resources including novels and other texts. Good emphasis is given to developing the children's phonological awareness through the use of a graded phonics programme.

Reading in English is taught systematically from year 4. A commercial reading scheme forms the core of the reading material, supplemented in the majority of classes by novels. The children have access to a range of appropriate fiction and non-fiction books in both Irish and English in the class libraries and there are books on display based on year group topics. Regular visits to Shantallow library for the children in years 3 to 7 provide a further opportunity to access a range of reading material. Although the children have access to a wide range of free choice reading material there is a need to provide the older children in KS2 with a planned programme of reading beyond the commercial schemes presently provided; a range of challenging and appealing novels should be available for planned individual, group or whole-class activities.

The children talk enthusiastically about books and are able to discuss favourite authors and preferences; they read with confidence, expression and enthusiasm; there is evidence of individual class research on a favourite author. A progressive phonics programme is in place and children demonstrate the ability to use a variety of strategies to decode words. During the inspection several teachers read aloud to the children to model intonation, punctuation and expression. The school recognises the need to promote further the notion of dual and bi-literacy and to develop the children's ability to transfer skills across the languages and to further develop the children's experiences of English across the curriculum.

During the inspection there were some opportunities for the children in the FS and KS1 to develop writing skills through play-based learning but there is a need to fully exploit the potential of each activity to provide the children with challenging and meaningful writing experiences.

In KS2, the samples of work available during the inspection indicated that the children have limited opportunities to write in Irish and English for a variety of purposes and audiences. There were some examples of cross-curricular work but opportunities for writing across a range of subjects and topics needs to be provided for the children. There is also a need to provide further opportunities for the children to write more creatively in an imaginative style and improve the quality of the written texts to suit the developmental stage and ability of the children.

The school recently introduced a Cued Spelling programme for parents and children and there are plans to develop the skills of the year 7 children as peer mentors for this scheme. The school has recognised the need to build upon the skills and knowledge of the Irish language developed in the FS and KS1 to develop and enhance oral and written communication in English. The presentation of written work is variable.

2.3 MATHEMATICS AND NUMERACY

The co-ordinator for numeracy provides very good advice and support to the staff to improve and promote the teaching of mathematics and to ensure that each child develops appropriate mathematical skills and competencies. The focus of much of the work of the current year is on mental mathematics and processes, and good efforts are evident in all classes to raise the standards in these areas. The majority of the children enjoy their work in mathematics and more particularly when the work is of interest to them, relevant to their understanding and practical. In the lessons observed, the work was more effective when the children understand clearly the learning intentions and the activities build on previous learning and are purposeful. For some children in KS2, the work needs to be more challenging and consideration should be given to encouraging the children to think more creatively about their work and to work better in groups. The introduction of the Friday afternoon mathematics club is timely to help consolidate aspects of the mathematics programme identified by the staff as needing further support.

The school has recently purchased several interactive whiteboards and the staff have availed of professional development in their use. While individual teachers plan for the integration of ICT across the curriculum, the school has identified the need to develop a more cohesive planning structure to support learning and teaching using the available technology.

3. THE QUALITY OF PROVISION FOR LEARNING

3.1 PLANNING

The school has developed very useful whole-school policies and schemes to guide the work in both literacy and numeracy. Teachers plan their work conscientiously for all areas of the curriculum. They prepare detailed medium- and short-term planners; topic webs are used to develop and encourage cross-curricular learning and teaching. The school recognises the value of encouraging the children to contribute to the planning process and during the inspection there was evidence of the children's interests and ideas being taken into account in the planning of a class theme or topic. The planning identifies intended learning outcomes and is suitably differentiated to ensure that the needs of all the children are met appropriately.

The teachers regularly evaluate the learning and teaching in their respective classes but there is a need to develop this aspect of monitoring to ensure that individual, group and whole-class outcomes, in addition to approaches and resources, are evaluated and used to inform future planning.

3.2 TEACHING

Most of the teaching observed during the inspection was good and at times it was very good. In all lessons observed the learning outcomes and success criteria identified in the planning are shared with the children at the beginning of each lesson. In the best practice, teachers

used effective questioning techniques to promote thinking skills and the lessons were conducted with a suitable pace and the children's interest was maintained throughout the lesson. Effective plenary sessions were used by the teachers to evaluate the learning outcomes for the whole-class or individuals and children had an opportunity to tell the teacher and their peers the extent of their learning and how the outcomes could be improved. In some less effective lessons, learning opportunities were missed, teachers spent too much time talking and explaining; paired and group work was ineffective and children became inattentive and at times unsettled. While there are opportunities for the children to work in pairs and small groups, further consideration should be given to developing a better understanding of group work to ensure that the needs and interests of all the children are being met and that all children are participating fully in activities. Some of the rooms are very small and not ideal for active and investigative learning and group work but teachers could improve this aspect of their work.

Classroom displays are bright and stimulating and provide sources of learning for the children for example topic boards with labelling. The majority are commercial or teacher produced; there is a need to provide further opportunities for children to display their own work and to have opportunities to read the work of their peers.

3.3 ASSESSMENT

The school's approach to assessment is very good. The school tracks every child's progress systematically and the records show that most of the children are working at the levels expected for their age and ability in literacy and numeracy.

The teachers provide some opportunities for the children to self-assess their own work and set targets for future improvement; there is also some evidence of peer assessment. There is a very clear link between the assessment, teachers' planning and classroom practice. Teachers mark work regularly and they include occasional personal comments and praise the children's efforts. An examination of children's books shows, however, that the area of marking for improvement is not well enough developed.

3.4 SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS

The school provides well for the needs of those children who are experiencing difficulties with their learning. The staff are diligent in their planning to ensure that the work is matched to the children's abilities, and made interesting. Support and encouragement for individual children is common to all lessons. The special educational needs co-ordinator (SENCO) works hard to ensure that the children's educational needs are identified early and has introduced supportive strategies to enable the children to make progress and develop their confidence.

Assessment data indicate that planning for most of the children is effective; for example, the introduction of Cued Spelling is enabling the children to improve the quality of their work and reach satisfactory standards in literacy. Further analysis of the data indicates that a small number of the children require additional and more intensive support to effect improvement in their literacy and numeracy work. It is recommended that the SENCO is afforded time to

carry out this task and to develop further the children's education plans to include pupil learning profiles to assist the class teachers to differentiate their group teaching more effectively. It is also important that the parents are involved more fully in the support of their child's progress.

4. LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

4.1 LEADERSHIP

The Principal has been in post since 1993. He is committed to the work and life of the school. He is a determined leader and a conscientious manager; he is assisted by two senior teachers with responsibility for co-ordinating significant areas of the school's provision. The position of Vice-principal is currently unfilled. All the school's co-ordinators have responded well to the management responsibility devolved to them. Their work is having a notable impact in improving learning and teaching in both literacy and numeracy, and the staff clearly understand they are accountable for improving standards further.

The school's management team need to work more effectively to promote a sense of collegiality. The school currently needs more effective strategic leadership to ensure sustained improvement and, indeed, its future viability.

4.2 PLANNING FOR IMPROVEMENT

The Principal and co-ordinators work conscientiously to monitor and evaluate teaching and learning throughout the school. Teachers reflect well on their practice in light of the feedback they are given.

The school development plan (SDP) does not comply with the requirements of the School Development Plans Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2005 and does not address the current priorities of the school. It should be thoroughly reviewed in light of the findings of the present inspection and should involve the whole school community in a meaningful way.

4.3 STAFF DEVELOPMENT AND DEPLOYMENT

There are three beginning teachers on the staff of the primary school and a further beginning teacher has responsibility for the nursery provision. The teacher tutor is working very effectively to make sure that these young teachers are supported appropriately in their work. All staff have benefited from a range of in-service training (INSET) and other development opportunities, particularly in relation to the implementation of the revised Northern Ireland Curriculum.

Including the naíscoil class, there are three composite classes in the school. The smallest composite class is larger than the largest non-composite class. All the composite classes are being taught by beginning teachers. While there may be reasons why this situation has arisen, it is not appropriate.

4.4 ACCOMMODATION

Teachers have worked hard to create an attractive and stimulating learning environment for the children. The school's accommodation is, nevertheless, inadequate and falls far short of modern standards. It is unsuitable and does not meet the needs of the children and teachers, and does not contribute towards raising standards.

4.5 RESOURCES, FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT AND GOVERNANCE

The school currently has a substantial budget surplus. This should be examined in the context of the revised SDP.

The governors reported a level of frustration about having to devote so much time and energy on staff issues which has taken their focus away from learning and teaching. They are currently not involved enough in the process of school development planning. They need to become more meaningfully involved in the work and life of the school, and they need to give more emphasis to the accountability of the Principal, the shaping of the school's future and to asking challenging questions.

5. CONCLUSION

5.1 The strengths of the school include:

- the very good quality of the arrangements for pastoral care;
- the well-behaved children and their positive attitude towards their learning;
- the commitment of the hard-working staff;
- the quality of the teaching observed, most of which was good or better;
- the strong link between assessment and classroom practice; and
- the high quality of the work of the co-ordinators, their thorough planning for the curriculum, and their commitment to monitoring and evaluation.

5.2 The areas for improvement include the need:

- to review the deployment of staff and resources to meet more effectively the needs of all of the children;
- to produce a more comprehensive and collaborative SDP, to set out the long-term vision for the school, including the actions to improve the opportunities the children have to apply their learning in a variety of settings and to secure the future viability of the school; and
- to promote the work of the school through the greater involvement of governors, parents and the wider community.

In most of the areas inspected the quality of education provided in this school is satisfactory; the strengths outweigh areas for improvement in the provision. The inspection has identified areas for improvement in learning and teaching, and leadership and management which need to be addressed if the needs of all the learners are to be met more effectively. The Education and Training Inspectorate will monitor and report on the school's progress in addressing the areas for improvement.

6. NAÍScoil DHOIRE

6.1 Naíscoil Dhoire is situated in the grounds of Bunscoil Cholmcille. The children attending the naíscoil come from a wide catchment area, including the city and surrounding rural areas. The naíscoil opened in September 2002 and in September 2004 moved to the current site with its purpose-built accommodation. The naíscoil has a small, secure outdoor play area. Currently, 26 children attend the naíscoil on a full-time basis and eleven of them are in their penultimate pre-school year.

6.2 A small number of the parents responded to the questionnaire and one made additional written comments. The responses from the parents indicate high levels of satisfaction with the quality of the provision; those who responded appreciate both the caring staff and the warm, friendly atmosphere in the naíscoil.

6.3 One teachers questionnaire was completed; the response was highly affirmative of all aspects of the work of the naíscoil. The responses from all of the questionnaires have been taken into account as part of the inspection and were shared with the staff and governors.

6.4 The quality of the arrangements for pastoral care is good. The staff are caring and work well as a team; they demonstrate a strong commitment to the welfare of the children.

6.5 The naíscoil has satisfactory arrangements in place for safeguarding children. These arrangements reflect the guidance issued by the relevant Departments. The naíscoil adheres to the policies and procedures of the Bunscoil. The naíscoil would benefit from having a named person to oversee child protection matters within the naíscoil.

6.6 The staff give very good attention to promoting healthy eating and physical activity, and effective policies and programmes are in place to encourage the children to adopt healthy lifestyles.

6.7 The main strengths within the naíscoil's educational and pastoral provision are as follows:

- the learning environment is bright, attractive and colourful; good use is made of all the available space to provide different areas for play;
- relationships with the parents are good; appropriate methods are used to inform the parents about the educational programme and their children's progress;
- the staff are very competent and confident in their use of the Irish language and can meet fully the linguistic needs of the children; and
- the staff are hard-working, committed and caring; they meet regularly to plan the educational programme and the use of appropriate themes provides variety in the children's learning throughout the year.

6.8 The inspection identified areas for improvement. The following are the most important areas that need attention.

- The naíscóil needs to review the settling-in procedures to ensure that the differing needs of all the children are met.
- The staff need to ensure that the strategies outlined in their behaviour management policy are understood by all of the children and implemented effectively by the staff.
- The staff need to improve the organisation of the day to ensure that all of the time is used effectively to promote learning.

6.9 In almost all of the areas inspected, the quality of education provided by this centre is inadequate; the areas for improvement outweigh the strengths in the provision. The inspection has identified significant areas for improvement in the standard of the children's achievements, the quality of the learning and teaching and the quality of the leadership and management, all of which need to be addressed urgently if the organisation is to meet effectively the needs of all of the learners.

The Education and Training Inspectorate will monitor and report on the naíscóil's progress in addressing the areas for improvement, over a 12-18 month period.

STATISTICAL INFORMATION ON NAÍScoil DHOIRE

1. Details of Children

Number of children:	Class 1	Class 2
Attending full-time	26	0
Attending part-time	0	0
Under 3 years of age*	11	0
With statement of SEN**	0	0
At CoP stages 3 or 4***	0	0
At CoP stages 1 or 2***	2	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.	2
Average attendance for the previous year.	90%

2. Duration of Sessions

Full-time	Part-time: am	Part-time: pm
4½ hours	-	-

3. Details of Staff

Number of:	Full-Time	Part-Time
Teachers	1	0
Nursery Assistants	1	0
Qualified Nursery Assistants	0	0

Number of: ****	
Students	0
Trainees	0

**** Total placements since September of current year

4. Parental Questionnaires (to be completed by Inspection Services Branch)

Number issued	26
Percentage returned	15%
Number of written comments	1

HEALTH AND SAFETY

The school is situated on a sloping site which was inadequately gritted and in a dangerous state during icy conditions.

© CROWN COPYRIGHT 2009

This report may be reproduced in whole or in part, except for commercial purposes or in connection with a prospectus or advertisement, provided that the source and date thereof are stated.

Copies of this report are available on the DE website: www.deni.gov.uk or may be obtained from the Inspection Services Branch, Department of Education, Rathgael House, 43 Balloo Road, Bangor, Co Down BT19 7PR.