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**Department of Education  
Department for Employment and Learning  
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## **Education and Training Inspectorate**

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

#### **Bushmills Primary School and Nursery Unit Co Antrim**

**Inspected: May 2009**

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 SCHOOL CONTEXT

Bushmills Primary School is situated at Priestland Road in the town of Bushmills, County Antrim. Most of the children come from the town; a small number travel from the surrounding rural area by car or bus. The enrolment has fallen in recent years and currently stands at 80 children. Almost 37% of the children are entitled to receive free school meals; 15% have been identified as requiring additional support with aspects of their learning.

The school has a single nursery unit attached to it; enrolment to the unit has remained steady over the past five years. Since the last inspection, a nursery assistant has been appointed to the unit.

### 1.2 FOCUS

The inspection focused on the quality of the work in English/literacy and mathematics/numeracy, including the contribution of information and communication technology (ICT) in promoting and supporting learning and teaching in these two areas of the curriculum. The school's arrangements for pastoral care, including child protection, and the work of the nursery were also evaluated as part of the inspection.

### 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 confidential questionnaires prior to the inspection, as well as meetings with representatives from the Board of Governors (governors) and a group of children from years 5 and 6.

In the primary school, 59 questionnaires were issued to the parents; 36% of these were returned to the Department of Education (DE) and, of these, six contained written comments. Three of the staff responded to the online questionnaire and there were no additional written comments. In the nursery, 26 questionnaires were issued to the parents; 39% were returned and, of these, five contained written comments.

Almost all of the responses from the parental questionnaires indicated that the parents consider that their children are safe, secure and well-settled at both the school and the nursery. A small number of responses indicated that parents were unsure about the school's procedures through which concerns could be raised; reference was also made to the outworking of the procedures in a specific instance. The Education and Training Inspectorate (Inspectorate) has reported to the Principal and the governors the main issues emerging from the questionnaires.

In their responses, the teachers indicated that they believe that the health, pastoral and educational needs of the children are met effectively.

The governors expressed their appreciation of the dedication and commitment of the teachers and reported that the school had a strong reputation within the local community.

The children in years 5 and 6 spoke positively about their experiences in school, particularly the range of physical activities available, including playing for the school's football team. They reported that they feel safe and know to whom they can turn, if they have any concerns about their care and well-being.

#### 1.4 PASTORAL CARE

The quality of the provision for pastoral care in the main school is very good; the school is characterised by a supportive ethos, including very good working relationships, and a safe and secure environment in which the children feel at ease.

The school has an effective scheme to reward positive behaviour and the children's achievements. The children are well-mannered and welcoming to visitors; they are courteous and display high standards of behaviour. The bright displays in the corridors throughout the school celebrate the children's work, record their activities and achievements and provide a supportive environment for learning and teaching. The classroom assistants contribute significantly to promoting and maintaining a pleasant working environment for the children. The quality of the cleaning and caretaking is very good.

The quality of pastoral care in the nursery is very good. As in the main school working relationships at all levels are very good. Furthermore, there is a strong sense of team-spirit and well-established links with the parents.

#### 1.5 CHILD PROTECTION

The school has satisfactory arrangements in place for safeguarding children, and these arrangements broadly reflect the guidance issued by DE. However, the following areas need to be addressed: fuller consultation with parents when reviewing the policies identified in DE circular 2003/13; and the training for the designated teacher needs to be brought up-to-date.

The nursery has comprehensive arrangements in place for safeguarding children, which reflect the guidance issued by DE.

#### 1.6 HEALTHY EATING AND PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

The school and nursery give very good attention to promoting healthy eating and physical activity, through, for example, healthy breaks and a programme that encourages the children to adopt healthy lifestyles.

### 2. ACHIEVEMENTS AND STANDARDS

#### 2.1 LEARNING

The children work well and at times with enthusiasm, particularly in tasks involving ICT. They respond readily to the teachers' questions and participate fully in paired and group work. On occasions during the inspection the children responded well when given opportunities to work independently. A greater focus is needed on developing further the children's independence and promoting peer and self-evaluation.

## 2.2 ENGLISH AND LITERACY

The quality of provision for literacy is generally satisfactory. Appropriately, literacy is identified as an area for improvement in the school development plan (SDP) and the accompanying action plan specifies additional forms of writing to be promoted. However, the action plan does not highlight sufficiently the monitoring and evaluation strategies to be employed. At the time of the inspection the school was about to appoint a new literacy co-ordinator; it will be important that the new co-ordinator undertakes a review of literacy in the school in order to bring about the necessary improvements.

The whole-school guidance for literacy is not as consistently detailed as it should be; for example, the forms of writing are not matched to specific years or key stages, resulting in insufficient planning for progression. In the teachers' medium- and short-term planning, there is an over-emphasis on the activities which the children will undertake instead of the main focus being on the intended learning outcomes. In the foundation stage (FS), play-based learning is an integral part of the provision. However, during the inspection, opportunities to develop the children's talking and listening skills were not exploited effectively. At key stage (KS) 1, differentiated group work is used appropriately to develop the children's oral skills and help increase their confidence. As they progress through KS2 the children's talking and listening continue to be supported through appropriate group and paired work. In the best practice observed, the teachers used open-style questions as stimuli for developing thought and discussion; too often, however, the questions required only short, spoken responses.

In the FS and KS1, the children acquire reading skills through the development of phonological awareness and experience of shared and guided reading. There are well-stocked class libraries in the KS2 classes, although the attractive new books are not always displayed to optimum effect. The school library also needs to be re-stocked and made more attractive in order to better promote reading throughout the school. At the FS, the children display good word recognitions skills when reading aloud. In KS1, the children display increasing fluency and understanding in their reading. By KS2 the most confident readers have developed strategies to sound unfamiliar words and work out their meanings. While the school provides increasingly sophisticated texts, the teachers need to match these texts more closely to individual children's abilities, and ensure that the most able readers are more effectively challenged than they are currently.

In the FS, the children's experiences in play-based learning and topic work are used appropriately as a basis for early writing; strategies to build the children's confidence in spelling, such as the use of 'have-a-go' books, need to be developed further. In KS1, basic conventions such as simple sentence structure and letter formation are developed effectively through shared writing activities and writing frames. In KS2, the children have opportunities to write for a variety of purposes. On balance, the children's opportunities to write more extensively are constrained through the need to complete decontextualised grammar and comprehension exercises.

In the best practice observed, the interactive whiteboard was used well to stimulate writing and support learning. At KS2, when using word-processing software, the children had insufficient opportunities to re-draft their work following self- and/or peer-assessment.

## 2.3 MATHEMATICS AND NUMERACY

The quality of the mathematics provision is inadequate. The school was approached by the North-Eastern Education and Library Board (NEELB) to join the Raising Achievement in Numeracy (RAIN) programme in September 2007. This has involved support from the NEELB's Curriculum Advisory and Support Service (CASS) to promote the greater use of practical activities in the teaching and learning of mathematics. The associated SDP action plan for 2007-08 identified appropriate success criteria but failed to outline relevant monitoring strategies. While numeracy remains an identified area for improvement in the SDP for the current year, as yet, no action plan has been drawn up.

The teachers use the NEELB's guidance for Number, the Revised Lines of Development and a commercial scheme to plan a broad and balanced coverage in number, shape and space, measures and handling data. Working in collaboration, the teachers need to develop whole-school guidance that is matched to the children's needs, ensures progression in their mathematical learning and incorporates a greater emphasis on mathematical processes and mental mathematics strategies. The medium-term planning template devised by the teachers has been overly influenced by practical mathematics: it concentrates too narrowly on concepts and associated practical activities. It needs to focus on the intended learning outcomes, be better matched to the ability ranges in the classes and be supplemented by activities based on the range of ways children learn and master mathematical concepts.

The experiences of the children within the mathematics lessons observed, varied in quality. The activities were often at too low a level of challenge and the teachers missed opportunities to engage the children fully in high-quality mathematical thinking. The teachers need to provide more challenging activities that, for example, involve problem-posing as well as problem-solving, and extend the opportunities for the children to explain their mathematical reasoning.

During the inspection, a number of sessions that focused on mental mathematics were observed. In the most effective practice, the teacher encouraged the children to explain how they obtained the answer and discussed carefully with the children any incorrect answers. In other sessions, opportunities were missed for the children to share their strategies with the rest of the class and for the teachers to showcase more efficient strategies.

The children have opportunities to use ICT, for example, in representing data graphically and, in the best practice observed, the teachers used the interactive whiteboards to engage the children in mathematics. The teachers need to develop further the use of ICT to enhance the teaching and learning in mathematics.

During the inspection, the older children demonstrated their knowledge of important ideas and concepts, such as, place value, multiplication and the properties of three-dimensional solids. They were less competent in demonstrating flexibility in their mathematical thinking.

## 2.4 STANDARDS

Over the period 2006-08, in English and in mathematics, approximately three-fifths of the children at the end of KS2 achieved the expected level of attainment and approximately one-fifth achieved the highest level. However, over the same period, in both areas of learning, there has been an overall downward trend in the children's achievements. The teachers need to reverse this trend through ensuring that there is sufficient progression in the learning and achievement in literacy and numeracy for all of the children.

## 3. THE QUALITY OF PROVISION FOR LEARNING

### 3.1 PLANNING

The teachers use a range of templates for their medium-term planning. There is a need for a more detailed structure to this planning that places a greater focus on the intended learning outcomes, the experiences to be provided for the children, the assessment strategies to be used and the teacher's evaluations of whether the learning has been attained.

### 3.2 TEACHING

The quality of the teaching in a significant minority of lessons observed was good; in nearly one-half, it was satisfactory; and in a minority of lessons, it was inadequate. In the more effective lessons observed: the teacher shared the intended learning outcomes with the children; the children were fully engaged in interesting work which was well-matched to their needs and abilities; the teacher used effective questioning that elicited full responses from the children; and the interactive whiteboard was used effectively to initiate opportunities for the children to share and discuss their work. In the less effective lessons: the intended learning outcomes were unclear; the work was overly teacher-directed with a predominantly whole-class approach; the pace and challenge were at a low level for some of the children; and the children had insufficient opportunities to reflect on and talk about what they had learnt.

### 3.3 ASSESSMENT

The teachers mark the children's work regularly. They often supplement their marking with encouraging comments, but rarely add helpful insights that indicate how the children might improve their work. There is a need to develop further the use of formative assessment in order that the intended learning outcomes are matched more closely to the needs of the children.

### 3.4 SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS

The provision for the children who require additional support with their learning is good. The school has identified 14 children who are experiencing difficulties with aspects of their learning. The small numbers in each class enable the children to be supported effectively by their teachers on a daily basis. Appropriately, they are also withdrawn in small groups for short sessions of support in English. Three of these children benefit from the provision of a classroom assistant. In the majority of lessons observed, and in the withdrawal sessions, the teachers worked well with the children. There is evidence that the children make progress through these arrangements for support.



The special educational needs co-ordinator (SENCO), who is also the Vice-principal, keeps comprehensive records, liaises with the part-time special educational needs teacher and works well with the class teachers, monitoring closely the children's progress and adjusting the support when required. Suitable educational plans have been devised and the special needs register is updated regularly. There are appropriate procedures in place to inform the parents of their children's progress through the twice-yearly parental interviews with the SENCO.

#### **4. LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT**

##### **4.1 LEADERSHIP**

The Principal has been in post for 19 years. During this time, the children's well-being and the school's links with the local community have been the focus of his leadership and management. For example, the Principal was instrumental in setting up a 'locality group' which established the Pyramid Plus scheme for children at the primary/post-primary transition stage of their education. In addition, the school has strong links with a drop-in centre for young people and also hosts a Sure Start project for pre-school children. In recent years, the school has been in the Extended Schools initiative and provides a breakfast club, after-school clubs and various activities for parents and others.

However, in the light of the inspection findings, there is a pressing need now for the Principal and senior management, and governors, to plan and act strategically for improvement, for example, to undertake a review of the roles and responsibilities of the co-ordinators, in order that the work of the school and the standards achieved by the children are monitored and evaluated more effectively. There is also a need to use data more consistently and rigorously in the process of improvement.

##### **4.2 PLANNING FOR IMPROVEMENT**

The SDP broadly fulfils the requirements of the School Development Plans Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2005, although the quality of important aspects of the plan needs to improve, including: the use of self-evaluation in order to prioritise the targets within the three-year outline; the ongoing monitoring of the effectiveness of the actions taken; and the review of the improvements relative to the identified success criteria.

#### **5. CONCLUSION**

##### **5.1 The strengths of the school include:**

- the supportive and inclusive ethos, including the courteous and well-behaved children;
- the very good provision for pastoral care;
- the arrangements for those children who require additional support with their learning; and
- the commitment of the staff, teaching and non-teaching, to the children, the school and its place within the community.

5.2 The areas for improvement include the need:

- to improve the quality of planning and teaching in order that there is sufficient progression in the learning and achievement for all of the children, for example in literacy;
- to review the provision for mathematics in order to provide more challenging activities and promote higher levels of mathematical thinking; and
- for senior management to plan strategically for curriculum developments ensuring a clear focus on the evaluation of their effect on the quality of teaching and on the children's achievement.

5.3 Consequently, the quality of education provided by this school is inadequate; the areas for improvement outweigh the strengths in the provision. The inspection has identified significant areas for improvement in teaching and learning, standards, and leadership and management, which need to be addressed urgently if the school is to meet effectively the needs of all of the children.

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

It will be important that the employing authority, governors and staff plan for, and manage, issues related to the sustainability of the school provision and school budget, in order to address the current and future needs of the children and the staff.

## 6. THE NURSERY UNIT

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

- the children display good levels of motivation and interest in their learning. They have confidence to ask the staff for help and support, and their behaviour is good. The children's work, which demonstrates their progress and development, is attractively displayed and creates a stimulating learning environment;
- the programme offers very good opportunities for learning in all areas of the curriculum. During the inspection, there were particular strengths observed in the promotion of the children's personal, social and emotional development and of their oral language and listening skills; in the development of early science ideas; in the use made of natural and real materials in most areas of play; and in the daily opportunities for physical play outdoors;
- the quality of the staff's interaction with the children, observed during the inspection, promotes the children's concentrated and co-operative play;
- the daily timetable is well organised and provides a lengthy period of uninterrupted play, balanced with activities led by the staff. The routines and transitions are well managed, and the children have daily opportunities for stories and rhymes;
- the staff have established a range of methods to keep the parents well informed of the daily programme and the children's progress. Effective arrangements are in place to ensure that the children from the nursery make a smooth transition to year 1; and
- the staff are very hard-working and dedicated; they have a caring approach and know the children well. The teacher-in-charge provides effective leadership. She is committed to reflecting on and improving their practice, particularly in relation to the involvement of the parents more fully in the children's education. She is ably supported by her nursery assistant.

The staff have developed an effective approach to self-evaluation and there is clear evidence that the process has led to improvements in the children's learning experiences. The development plan is detailed and identifies important areas for improvement. Appropriate action plans have been drawn up to address each priority.

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.

## STATISTICAL INFORMATION ON THE NURSERY UNIT IN BUSHMILLS PRIMARY SCHOOL

### 1. Details of Children

<b>Number of children:</b>	<b>Class 1</b>	<b>Class 2</b>
Attending full-time	26	0
Attending part-time	0	0
Under 3 years of age*	4	0
With statement of SEN**	0	0
At CoP stages 3 or 4***	0	0
At CoP stages 1 or 2***	3	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.	8%
Average attendance for the previous year.	89.4%

### 2. Duration of Sessions

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

### 3. Details of Staff

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

<b>Number of: ****</b>	
Students	1
Trainees	0

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

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

Number issued	26
Percentage returned	38.5%
Number of written comments	5

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