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*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

**Donard School
Banbridge**

Inspected: January 2009

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STATISTICAL INFORMATION (SPECIAL SCHOOLS)

1.1 i. **School: Donard School** iii. **Date of Inspection: W/B 19.01.09**
Banbridge

ii. **School Reference Number: 531-6520** iv. **Nature of Inspection: Focused**

1.2

School Year	2004/05	2005/06	2006/07	2007/08	2008/09
Total Enrolment	41	41	45	43	49

The enrolment for the current year is the figure on the day of notification of inspection. For previous years it is the figure in the annual return to the Department of Education.

1.3 Number of Pupils in Outreach Programme: 0

1.4 Average Attendance for the Previous School Year: 94.4%

1.5 i. Number of Teachers in School: 8 on Outreach Programme: 0
(including the Principal and p/t teachers)
(f/t equivalent = 25 teaching hours)

ii. PTR (pupil/teacher ratio): 6.13

iii. Average Class Size: 7

iv. Number of Classroom Assistants: 17

v. Ancillary Support:
Number of Hours per week:

Clerical Support: 128.5

vi. Percentage of children in receipt of free
school meals: 26.53%

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Donard School is situated in Banbridge and provides education for 49 pupils aged from three to 19 years of age who have severe learning difficulties. The Principal and Vice-principal are both recently appointed.

1.2 The new school building opened in 2002; the school accommodation is supplemented by a mobile classroom.

1.3 The arrangements for the inspection of pastoral care and child protection included the opportunity for the parents to complete a confidential questionnaire prior to the inspection as well as meetings with representatives from the Board of Governors (governors) and two groups of pupils. Forty-five questionnaires were issued to the parents; 60% of these were returned to the Department of Education (DE) and 11 contained written comments. The responses from the parental questionnaires indicated the parents are content that their children are safe, secure and well-settled at the school. The governors expressed their appreciation of the positive ethos within the school, the high quality of the pastoral care and the excellent leadership of the Principal. Both groups of pupils spoke very positively about their experiences in school. They reported that they feel safe and know whom to turn to if they have any concerns about their care and well-being. The Education and Training Inspectorate has reported to the Principal and representatives of the governors the findings from the questionnaires and the discussions.

1.4 The focus of the inspection was on the standards achieved by the pupils, the quality of the provision for learning, the leadership and management of the school and the arrangements for child protection and pastoral care.

2. ACHIEVEMENTS AND STANDARDS

2.1 Throughout the inspection, the pupils' standards of achievements were judged in relation to their previous educational records.

2.2 Donard School is an outstanding school. The pupils progress very well in their learning and achieve high standards commensurate with their ability. The teachers write appropriate individual learning programmes for the pupils and all the pupils achieve the targets set for them. The pupils build on their previous learning experiences through clear whole-school planning for learning and transition arrangements throughout the school. The pupils are enthusiastic in their learning activities and achieve a range of appropriate accreditations in the senior school. All pupils in the leavers' class achieve well in the Prince's Trust XL Programme. The majority of the pupils in the leavers' class participate in the Award Scheme Development and Accreditation Network (ASDAN) and achieve a range of unit awards. All pupils in the leavers' class achieve appropriate accreditation in the Oxford Cambridge and RSA (OCR) Examinations body for Life and Learning. The pupils have recently begun the 'NewHop Skills for Work' programme accredited by the Open College Network (OCN) through the Appleby Trust. The comprehensive senior school programme, including work experience and the content of accredited courses results in the pupils developing increasing independence, self-confidence and appropriate skills enabling them to make successful transitions to life after school.

2.3 The school gives outstanding attention to promoting healthy eating and physical activity, for example healthy food provision in the canteen and the Food Fair event, which encourage the pupils to adopt healthy lifestyles.

2.4 The inspection findings identified the following strengths in the achievements of the pupils:

- the pupils learn the skills to work independently, and in groups, and achieve sustainable progress;
- the pupils attain the comprehensive and appropriate targets which are set in their individual education plans;
- the pupils achieve healthy lifestyles through the wide-ranging, interesting and appropriate activities which permeate the school curriculum;
- the pupils demonstrate very positive attitudes both socially and in their learning; and
- the pupils' behaviour is excellent and they become increasingly competent in the use of self-management behavioural strategies.

3. QUALITY OF PROVISION FOR LEARNING

3.1 The quality of teaching in the school is outstanding. Nearly all of the teaching observed was very good or better; almost 60% of the lessons were judged to be of outstanding quality. The members of staff have created a calm and welcoming learning environment in which the pupils excel and feel safe and secure. The high quality of the teachers' planning and the thorough and continuous monitoring and assessment of the learning ensures that the needs of the pupils are met well. A wide and appropriate range of teaching strategies are used well throughout the school, for example interactive whiteboards are used innovatively. The members of staff are all hard-working and are dedicated to the welfare of the pupils. The classroom teams, teachers, classroom assistants and therapists, collaborate effectively to provide a multi-disciplinary approach to teaching and to assessing learning.

3.2 The school has links with a broad range of schools in the area and has developed successful initiatives with them, including video-conferencing, drama and an eco project which engage and interest the children. The school is an active member of the local Area Learning Community. The school provides workshops on topics pertinent to the school community including behaviour management, play and communication and has established a Parent/Teacher Association. The school environment is very well cared for and maintained.

3.3 The school has very good comprehensive arrangements in place for safeguarding the pupils. These arrangements reflect fully the guidance issued by the relevant Department. The provision for pastoral care in the school is outstanding. There is a very good positive ethos throughout the school which ensures highly positive working relationships among

members of staff and pupils. The pupils' experiences and successes are celebrated in a range of colourful and bright displays in the classrooms and in the main school concourse. There are comprehensive and positive links with parents including good daily communication through home/school diaries.

3.4 The inspection findings identified the following strengths in the quality of the provision for learning:

- the very positive and welcoming ethos which permeates the life of the school, including the outstanding quality of the pastoral care;
- the outstanding quality of the teaching throughout the school;
- the very high quality of planning, assessment and evaluation of the learning and teaching;
- the very good working relationships among the teachers, classroom assistants and therapists which enables them to work together in a constructive manner;
- the high quality of the provision for information and communication technology, including assistive technology, which motivates and stimulates the pupils' learning; and
- the very good quality of the ancillary care of the school, the clerical administrator and the catering staff.

4. LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

4.1 The leadership in the school is outstanding. The Principal provides strategic leadership and a clear educational direction for the work of the school. She promotes and sustains improvements in standards and in the quality of provision. She is very ably supported by the Vice-principal and the whole school team. The culture for self-evaluation is established in the school and the school recognises the need for continuous development to raise standards further and to promote best practice. The co-ordinators access appropriate staff development opportunities and monitor and evaluate effectively learning outcomes across the school. This good practice is shared throughout the school.

4.2 The improvement process is clearly linked to a very well-constructed school development plan (SDP). There are excellent opportunities for consultation about the SDP within the school community with thorough analysis of responses. Policies and programmes are in place and have been recently reviewed by the staff and governors. The school gives very good attention to the requirements of the School Development Plans Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2005.

4.3 The main strengths of the leadership and management of the school are:

- the outstanding leadership of the Principal, skillfully supported by the Vice-principal;

- the good quality of monitoring and evaluation of the teaching and learning throughout the school;
- the comprehensive and effective process for development planning which has led to the production of an outstanding SDP;
- the well organised and appropriately focused opportunities available for staff development; and
- the very strong support for the school and its leadership by the members of the Board of Governors.

5. **OVERALL EFFECTIVENESS**

5.1 The overall effectiveness of the school shows strengths in all aspects of the areas inspected.

5.2 The inspection has identified the following strengths:

- the outstanding leadership demonstrated by the Principal with the significant support of the Vice-principal;
- the outstanding school ethos characterised by the very high quality of the pastoral care provision and the standard of working relationships throughout the school;
- the pupils, who engage well in their learning and who display very high standards of good behaviour;
- the outstanding quality of the majority of the teaching in the school;
- the highly effective collaborative practice apparent in the classroom teams; and
- the governors and parents who provide strong support for the school.

6. **CONCLUSION**

6.1 In the areas inspected, the quality of education provided by this school is outstanding; the quality of pastoral care is also outstanding. The school has demonstrated its capacity for sustained self-improvement.

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