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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

**Gaelscoil na gCrann
Omagh**

Inspected: March 2009

CONTENTS

Section		Page
	STATISTICAL INFORMATION	
1.	INTRODUCTION	1
2.	ACHIEVEMENTS AND STANDARDS	2
3.	THE QUALITY OF PROVISION FOR LEARNING	3
4.	LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT	5
5.	CONCLUSION	5
	APPENDIX	

BASIC INFORMATION SHEET (BIS) - PRIMARY SCHOOLS

- A. i. **School: Gaelscoil na gCrann** iii. **Date of Inspection: W/B 02.03.09**
 ii. **School Reference Number: 204-6677** iv. **Nature of Inspection: Focused**

B.

School Year	2004/05	2005/06	2006/07	2007/08	2008/09
Year 1 Intake	0	0	12	11	11
Enrolments					
Primary	0	0	38	45	51
Reception	0	0	0	0	0
Nursery Class/Classes	0	0	0	0	0
Special Unit	0	0	0	0	0

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.

The calculations at C and D should be based on the total of the primary and reception enrolments only.

- C. Average Attendance for the Previous School Year
 (expressed as a percentage):

93.5%

Primary & Reception	Nursery Unit	Special Unit
------------------------	-----------------	-----------------

- | | | | | |
|-------|---|---------|--------------|-----|
| D. i. | Number of Teachers
(including the principal and part-time teachers):
(Full-time equivalent = 25 teaching hours) | 4 | 0 | 0 |
| ii. | PTR (Pupil/Teacher Ratio): | 12.5 | NI PTR: 20.8 | |
| iii. | Average Class Size: | 7 | | |
| iv. | Class Size (Range): | 1 to 11 | | |
| v. | Ancillary Support:
Number of Hours Per Week : | | | |
| | i. Clerical support: | | | 15 |
| | ii. Official Making A Good Start Support: | | | 0 |
| | iii. Additional hours of other classroom assistant support: | | | 25 |
| vi. | Percentage of children with statements of special educational needs: | | | 0% |
| vii. | Total percentage of children on the Special Needs Register: | | | 22% |
| viii. | Number of children who are not of statutory school age: | | | 0 |
| ix. | Percentage of children entitled to free school meals: | | | 20% |

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 SCHOOL CONTEXT

Gaelscoil na gCrann is an Irish-medium primary school situated in temporary accommodation in the grounds of the Dún Uladh Cultural Heritage Centre on the outskirts of Omagh. Most of the children live locally, with a small number coming from a wider catchment area. The school's current enrolment is 51 children. The number of children in the classes in year 4-7 is very small; they transferred to the school from another Irish-medium unit when the school opened. One-fifth of the children are entitled to free school meals. Approximately 22% of the children are identified as having special educational needs (SEN).

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 the inspection as well as meetings with representatives from the Board of Governors (governors), and the children in years 6 and 7.

Thirty-six questionnaires were issued to parents; 33% were returned to the Department of Education (DE) and seven contained additional written comments. The responses from the questionnaires indicated strong satisfaction with the work of the school. The small number of issues raised were discussed with the Acting-Principal and the governors.

The children in years 6 and 7 reported that they feel safe and happy in school. They know where to get help in the event of any concern. However, they need to be made more fully aware of the role and responsibilities of the designated and deputy designated teachers for child protection.

The governors commended the work of all the staff, the behaviour of the children and the good reputation of the school in the community. They described the great efforts made by the whole school community to get the school open and funded and the further work needed to demonstrate its long-term viability.

The Education and Training Inspectorate received one response from a member of the teaching staff to the online questionnaire expressing a high level of support for the school's management and all aspects of the life and work of the school.

1.4 PASTORAL CARE

The school has a caring ethos; the pastoral care of the children is good and there are good working relationships at all levels in the school. The children's achievements and efforts are celebrated through a range of effective reward systems and a good start has been made to

developing consultation with the children. There is a comprehensive suite of good quality policies in place and the school has established effective links with other schools and outside agencies.

1.5 CHILD PROTECTION

The school has comprehensive arrangements in place for safeguarding children. These arrangements reflect the guidance issued by DE.

1.6 HEALTHY EATING AND PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

The school gives good attention to promoting healthy eating and physical activity, for example the healthy lunchbox challenge and break time snacks. The establishment of further links with food-related health agencies, as opportunities arise, would be a useful development.

1.7 LINKS WITH PARENTS

The school has effective links with parents. A formal monthly newsletter and other information sheets are issued to parents giving details of school events, celebrating the children's achievements and providing information on aspects of the life and work of the school. Parents are kept informed about their children's progress through formal, annual meetings and written reports, and through regular informal contact.

1.8 OTHER LINKS

A number of external organisations offers a range of activities such as sports, art, music and Spanish to the children during the school day. Other extra-curricular and after-school activities are very limited.

2. ACHIEVEMENTS AND STANDARDS

2.1 IRISH, ENGLISH AND LITERACY

The standards achieved by the children in Irish and in English at the end of key stage (KS) 1 are good but they are inadequate at the end of KS2. The curriculum in the foundation stage is provided mainly through the medium of Irish. Through a carefully planned programme of total immersion in Irish, the school gives appropriate attention to the development of the children's aural and oral skills, maximising their exposure to Irish in carefully considered contexts and ensuring their successful acquisition of the language. The children are formally introduced to English in year 3. The teachers plan appropriately for the transference of skills from Irish to English in both reading and writing.

Throughout the school the children are confident speakers; they respond well to the teachers' questions and take part willingly in class or small group discussions. There are, however, too few opportunities for the children in year 4 and KS2 to pose questions of each other and the teacher, to express points of view and justify their opinions.

Reading in Irish is taught systematically and effectively using graded reading schemes in the early years. Reading in English is formally introduced in year 3. A new phonics programme has been introduced throughout the foundation stage, KS1 and KS2; this is having a positive impact on the children's ability to decode unfamiliar words. The children talk enthusiastically about reading and report that they enjoy the regular organised visits to Omagh Library. In year 3, Big Books are used effectively by the teacher to introduce and model reading; characters, plots and punctuation are highlighted and a general sense of enjoyment of literature is encouraged. However, in year 4 and at KS2, the children's current reading experiences are too narrow and need to be supplemented with a wider and more challenging choice of fiction and non-fiction texts.

In the foundation stage the children are provided with opportunities to become familiar with different forms of print, and basic writing conventions are highlighted through suitable play-based learning activities. In KS1 and KS2 the children have opportunities to use a range of writing forms and there is evidence that the children have planned drafted and edited some of their work. However, the standard of the children's written work in KS2 is poor: written activities in their books are incomplete, inaccurate and lacking in basic writing conventions; presentation is poor; and the children have few opportunities to write across the curriculum. The children's written work needs to be monitored and assessed regularly and frequently to ensure they make progress throughout the year. In order to effect improvement, there is a need to plan more appropriately for the range of ability within KS2, challenging the more able and meeting fully the needs of those children who require additional support.

2.2 MATHEMATICS AND NUMERACY

The school has a whole-school scheme for mathematics to guide the teachers' individual six-weekly planning. Lines of progression are clearly laid out with associated learning intentions, the mathematical language to be introduced and promoted, the skills to be developed and the associated assessment strategies. In the foundation stage and KS1, the children have opportunities to develop early mathematical language, concepts and skills and their learning in mathematics is consolidated through the use of practical activities. The use of mathematics is integrated into everyday life experiences; for example during a play-based learning session the children used real money to 'buy' their healthy snack break from the class shop and, with the effective support of the classroom assistant, were able to identify the coins required and give change. The children have a good range of learning experiences, including mathematical games. In KS2, however, the learning experiences are over-directed by teachers, and are not sufficiently differentiated to meet the needs of all children. By the end of KS2, the standards achieved by the children in mathematics are inadequate.

3. THE QUALITY OF PROVISION FOR LEARNING

3.1 PLANNING

The school has policies and schemes in place to guide the work of teachers in Irish, English and mathematics; these provide a useful guide for the teachers' 6-weekly plans. There is a need to evaluate the planners further to take account of the progress of individual children within the composite classes.

3.2 TEACHING

The teaching observed during the inspection ranged from very good to inadequate; the majority was good or better but a significant minority was inadequate. The most effective teaching was observed in years 1, 2 and 3 where the children were engaged and well motivated. The effective teaching was characterised by the teachers' use of a range of teaching strategies, including whole-class, group, paired and individual work; learning outcomes were shared with the children at the outset of the lesson and plenary sessions were used to encourage discussion and evaluate learning. In addition, teachers had high expectations of the children, were careful to make explicit connections across learning areas, and the needs of all the children were met. The teachers in the foundation stage and year 3 use effectively the interactive whiteboards and class laptops to develop the children's independence and enhance their learning experiences. This good practice needs to be disseminated throughout the school.

3.3 ASSESSMENT

The school's approach to assessment is inconsistent and lacks rigour; the link between assessment, teachers' planning and classroom practice is not strong enough. While teachers mark work regularly and include occasional personal comments and praise the children's efforts, too often the marking is superficial and does not outline clear areas for improvement.

3.4 SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS

The quality of the provision for the children identified as requiring additional support with aspects of their learning and behaviour is good. The special educational needs co-ordinator (SENCO) has been in post for over two years, has availed of extensive professional development in SEN and is proactive in encouraging other staff members to develop learning and teaching strategies to address the needs of children who require additional help and support.

The SENCO and teachers recognise the importance of early identification of individual need. The school is at an early stage of diagnostic testing; currently the identification of children requiring additional support depends on the observation of class teachers who report concerns to the SENCO; this is supplemented by the advice of external agencies. Appropriately, the school has recognised the need for more effective and formal assessment strategies and has recently invested in a variety of standardised tests. It will be important that age-appropriate reading resources are provided for the children in KS2 who require additional support.

The SENCO has worked hard to establish and maintain detailed individual pupil profiles for the children on the SEN register. The class teachers and the SENCO work together regularly to plan and review Individual Education Plans (IEPs); parents are regularly informed about and involved in their child's progress and individual children have an opportunity to contribute to the IEP. In the best practice, targets set are appropriately sharp and achievable within the appointed time frame; evaluations provide accurate and detailed information about progress in specific targets and are used to inform future targets. It will be important that the SENCO is supported to disseminate this good practice across the school.

4. LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

4.1 LEADERSHIP

The acting Principal has been in post since the school opened in September 2006. He is hard-working and dedicated to the work of the school and currently is undertaking the Professional Qualification for Headship with the Regional Training Unit. In leading the school the acting Principal needs to become more strategic in working with teachers: to plan for ongoing school improvement; address the weaknesses in the school's provision; and together with the teachers, raise the children's levels of attainment.

4.2 PLANNING FOR IMPROVEMENT

The school's procedures for planning for improvement are inadequate. The school development plan does not comply with the requirements of the School Development Plans Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2005 and does not address adequately the current priorities of the school. It should be thoroughly reviewed in light of the findings of the inspection.

4.3 STAFF DEVELOPMENT

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 Curriculum and in relation to their co-ordinating roles.

4.4 ACCOMMODATION

The school's accommodation comprises two double mobile classrooms and a mobile canteen. The teachers have worked hard and successfully to ensure that the children have an attractive and stimulating learning environment.

4.5 RESOURCES, FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT AND GOVERNANCE

The governors are committed to the life of the school and, with the rest of the school community, they have worked hard to get the school established. The school currently has a substantial budget surplus.

It will be important therefore that the governors, and the 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 school.

5. CONCLUSION

5.1 The strengths of the school include:

- the quality of the arrangements for pastoral care and child protection;
- the dedication and commitment of the staff to the work and life of the school;
- the quality of the teaching in years 1, 2 and 3; and

- the strong support of governors and parents.

5.2 The areas for improvement include the need to:

- develop more rigorous and consistent systems of assessment throughout the school;
- develop strategic leadership, to promote self-evaluation, and to establish effective structures to monitor and evaluate provision and outcomes; and
- raise the standards achieved by the children at the end of KS2;

In almost all of the areas inspected, 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 standards, learning and teaching, and in leadership and management, which need to be addressed urgently if the school is to meet effectively the needs of all of the children. The school will require well-focused, external support to help them take forward the areas identified for improvement.

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.

HEALTH AND SAFETY

- During the inspection, one of the buses used to transport children to and from the school did not have fitted seat belts.

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