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INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

Education and Training Inspectorate

Report of a Focused Inspection

**Holy Trinity Primary School
Belfast**

Inspected: April 2008

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Holy Trinity Primary School is situated in west Belfast. The school was formed in 2000 as a result of the amalgamation of Holy Trinity Boys' and Holy Trinity Girls' primary schools. The majority of children who attend the school live in the housing in the immediate vicinity of the school; an increasing number of children are coming to the school from other areas of Belfast and further afield. The enrolment has risen steadily over the last five years and currently stands at 624, which includes 64 children in the special units catering for the needs of children with moderate learning difficulties and children with hearing impairments. Approximately 48% of the children are entitled to free school meals. The school has identified 33% percent of the children as requiring additional support with aspects of their learning.

1.2 The arrangements for the inspection of pastoral care and child protection included the completion of questionnaires by parents and teachers as well as meetings with the Board of Governors (governors) and a group of children from year 6. Approximately 36% of the parental questionnaires were returned from parents of children in the primary school and 23 included a written comment. Approximately 45% of the parental questionnaires were returned from parents of the children who attend the units, and twelve included a written comment. The responses indicated that the parents and the governors are very supportive of all aspects of the work of the school; in particular, they value the school's welcoming ethos, the approachability of the staff and the support offered by the teachers to parents in helping their children to succeed. The views of the parents and the teachers have been shared with the Principal and the governors.

1.3 The inspection focused on the work in mathematics and the effectiveness of the school's special educational needs (SEN) provision. In addition, the inspection evaluated the work in information and communication technology (ICT) in promoting and supporting learning and teaching in mathematics and the school's procedures for pastoral care, including child protection.

2. THE QUALITY OF THE CHILDREN'S WORK

2.1 The children learn within a caring and supportive environment; there is a strong sense of a school community. The children are welcoming to visitors and, along with the staff, show a pride in their school. Despite the limitations posed by the layout of the school buildings, the extensive and attractive displays throughout the school enhance the learning environment and place value on the children's work. The teaching and support staff demonstrate a strong commitment to the children's development and well-being. The support staff contribute effectively to the quality of the children's learning opportunities.

2.2 The school establishes and maintains effective links with the parents. The parents are very supportive of the school. There are regular opportunities for the parents to consult with the teachers, both formally and informally, about their children's progress and pastoral issues. The parents attend school events, such as, sacramental celebrations, school assemblies and curriculum workshops relating to supporting them with their children's learning. The school's provision of a range of educational courses for parents is a mutually beneficial and valuable development in the partnership between the parents and the school, in support of the children's learning. The parents assist generously in raising funds for nominated charities.

2.3 The school provides an extensive range of extra-curricular opportunities for the children. These include modern languages, sports, as well as creative and expressive activities which promote the children's personal and social development. In addition the staff have put in place break and lunchtime arrangements for the children to include the successful development of a 'buddy system' which encourages the promotion of personal responsibility and the children's sense of inter-dependence.

2.4 The high quality of the arrangements for pastoral care is a significant feature of the school. The school has a range of pastoral care policies and procedures in place which implement fully the guidance outlined in the relevant Department of Education (DE) Circulars. The governors, staff, parents and children are fully aware of the school's procedures and have had the opportunity to contribute to a range of helpful policies that guide the work of the school. Concern for the children's all round development permeates the life and work of the school and is enhanced by the effective working relationships with a wide range of external agencies and professionals. The children's opinions and views are sought on a wide range of issues and many of their ideas to date have been implemented.

2.5 While careful attention has been given to the development of a comprehensive Child Protection policy, more attention needs to be given to the access and security arrangements of the school site and buildings in order to try to ensure the safety of the children and staff at all times.

2.6 The school gives excellent attention to promoting health and well-being, including opportunities for healthy eating and physical activity. There are effective policies and programmes in place, for example the health promoting school committee, healthy packed lunch initiative and health and fitness day, all of which encourage the children to make informed lifestyle choices.

2.7 The teachers are hard-working and committed to improving the children's learning and development; they plan their work conscientiously, meeting together in year groups to co-ordinate and plan lessons. The planning is monitored and evaluated by the co-ordinators to ensure it is informed by the main priorities agreed in the school development plan (SDP) and focused on raising the standards the children attain. Teachers evaluate their lessons and record the outcomes in their planning. In the best practice, the evaluations are appropriately detailed, enabling the teachers to plan effectively for future learning. In a small number of examples the written planning is too general and lacks sufficient detail and clear learning outcomes.

2.8 The quality of teaching observed, during the inspection, ranged from satisfactory to excellent. In most of the lessons it was good or very good. In the best practice observed, the lessons were well structured and imaginatively resourced, the intended learning outcomes were shared with the children at the beginning, returned to at appropriate times during the lesson and at the end of lessons there was review and consolidation of the learning. These lessons were conducted with appropriate pace and challenge, the teachers used skilful questioning that developed the children's ability to give extended responses and had high expectations of what the children could achieve. On the occasions when the teaching was less effective, the children had too few opportunities to engage in practical work, their responses were not built upon, the pace of the lesson was too slow and the work lacked sufficient challenge. There is a need to disseminate the excellent practice that exists within the school to ensure consistency in the quality of the children's learning experiences.

2.9 There are many strengths to the mathematics provision; the co-ordinator provides excellent leadership and guidance for the development of mathematics throughout the school. The children's mathematical experiences are developed systematically. Early emphasis on oral work and practical activities enables the children in the foundation stage to gain a good understanding of number and basic number operations, shape and space, measurement and awareness of mathematics in the environment. In addition, by the end of key stage (KS) 1, they can recognise common shapes, gather information and present it graphically, using ICT when appropriate. As they progress through the school, the children's knowledge and skills are developed progressively through a range of effective teaching approaches including practical activities, appropriate written work and discussion sessions. By the end of year 7, the children have a broad mathematical understanding, including place value, calculating, estimating and measuring, presenting and interpreting data and knowledge of the properties of a variety of two-dimensional and three-dimensional shapes. A feature of the children's learning is the extent to which they are given frequent opportunities to apply their learning to problem-solving and investigative activities.

2.10 During the inspection, much oral work of good quality was observed. The children's mental skills are well developed; most of the children demonstrate good flexibility in their mathematical thinking and talk confidently about their learning. The children's mathematical progress is assessed regularly; the outcomes the children achieve, reflected in the performance data held by the school, point to a generally high standards of mathematical attainment.

2.11 Through their involvement in the Northern Ireland Numeracy Strategy, the teachers have gained significantly in terms of professional development and are using effectively the teaching strategies they have acquired. The staff have welcomed and appreciated the support provided by the Belfast Education and Library Board's Curriculum Advisory and Support Service. Lines of development have been agreed and carefully selected tasks are generally well matched to the children's abilities to promote progression in their knowledge and skills; the co-ordinator has identified the need to develop further the work in mathematics by reviewing the policy to align the scheme more fully with the revised Northern Ireland Curriculum.

2.12 Support for those who require additional help with their learning, approximately one-third of the children, is a high priority for the school. The arrangements for identifying and recording individual needs are well documented and the policy provides clear guidance to teachers and classroom assistants. Individual children's progress in literacy and mathematics is tracked across the classes and every effort is made to ensure that the children benefit from the differentiated lessons and withdrawal support. The targets in individual education plans are specific, reviewed regularly and are a useful guide to classroom practice. In class, the children benefit from the close attention provided by the teacher and the classroom assistants as they learn. The children respond well to the support they receive. The withdrawal support for mathematics and literacy provides good support for those children in years 2 to 7 that have been identified as in need of additional support to consolidate their learning in class. In these withdrawal sessions, delivered by one full-time and two part-time SEN teachers, the children learn in a supportive environment and respond

well to the encouragement given to them by the teachers. The teaching approaches used are well matched to the children's learning needs and interests. This aspect of the work of the school would be enhanced further by observing and monitoring the impact of the support provided within the classrooms. Individually recorded performance data indicates that the children leave the school with improved reading and mathematical skills.

2.13 The school manages six units, two of which provide for children with hearing impairments. Each child has a statement of special educational need. The unit classes are located in the various appropriate KS areas within the school. The teachers and classroom assistants demonstrate a commitment to the children and their needs. Relationships in the classes are very good and the classroom assistants support effectively the work of the teachers. Teaching in the units is active and in the majority of instances of a very good standard, with a clear focus on encouraging the children to participate in the learning and develop their thinking in pairs and small groups. In the majority of the lessons observed, the children enjoyed the work and were well motivated by the good use of interactive whiteboards and practical work. In the best practice, the quality of the teacher's assessment, recording and planning is thorough and informs teaching and records the progress made by the children; the targets set for the children are realistic and achievable. In all of the lessons observed, praise and rewards are important features which promote positive behaviour and assist the children to concentrate and achieve. The staff are working to ensure that the children have effective and appropriate integration opportunities to learn alongside their peers in the mainstream primary school classes. This practice is proving to be effective and the school should continue to develop this aspect of its work.

2.14 Under the guidance of the two very effective co-ordinators, ICT resources are used regularly and appropriately to promote and extend the children's mathematical learning. Aspects of number, shape and measurement are consolidated regularly with appropriate use of various software programmes. Programmable devices such as Beebot and Roamer and simple Logo programmes help to develop the children's understanding of direction, scale and control. Data handling packages are used well to assist the children to collect, analyse and present data in a variety of forms; appropriately, the data is related to the children's experiences and interests. The children are confident and competent in their use of computers to support their work in mathematics. The school has demonstrated its commitment to the use of ICT by allocating substantial resources to augment those provided through the C2K managed service. These additional resources include interactive whiteboards which are now located in every classroom; the teachers continue to enhance their skills and capability in their use through well directed internal and external support. During the inspection, very effective lessons were observed in which this technology, as well as the mobile laptops computers, provided extension and challenge for the children as independent learners.

2.15 The children's experiences in the early years build upon the work provided through the good pastoral and curricular links that have been established with the feeder nursery schools. The staff within each year group have begun to review the policy for learning and teaching in the early years, to ensure that the good work achieved in implementing practical mathematics is developed further in all areas of the curriculum. During the inspection, the children demonstrated positive attitudes towards their learning; they displayed a clear sense of enjoyment and motivation as they participated in the activities. The teachers use visual timetables and classroom routines to promote the children's social skills, independence and healthy eating. Some new resources have been provided to enhance activity based learning

and the teachers have begun to organise areas of play for the children. The teachers are aware of the need to extend further the range and variety of activities on offer in order to provide good quality play experiences which provide adequate challenge and progression and ensure that the children's thinking skills and personal capabilities are promoted effectively.

2.16 The school has appropriate arrangements in place for monitoring and recording the progress of each child which includes, progress reports, year group moderation of samples of work, analysis of standardised test scores, and teacher observations. The extensive knowledge gained on each child's progress, ensures that the children receive appropriate support relevant to their needs. The parents have opportunities to discuss their child's progress through parent/teacher consultations that take place annually. In addition, a written evaluation of the child's progress is sent home at the end of the school year. The teachers mark the children's work regularly; they annotate the work with positive, often personalised comments. The staff are continuing to develop guidance on marking for improvement and have agreed features of the children's work that demonstrate progress. In the best practice the teachers indicate, through comment and example, how the children may actually improve the quality of their work.

2.17 The Principal is hard-working, dedicated and fully committed to the development of the life and work of the school. She has been in post for almost two years and demonstrates a strong commitment to the children's pastoral care and to improving the standards they attain. The Principal knows the children and their families well and sets high standards for behaviour and for the children's attainment. Led by the Principal, the staff have worked conscientiously to put in place a SDP that meets fully the requirements of the School Development Plans Regulations (Northern Ireland) Order 2005. In her work the Principal is ably assisted by the Vice-principal and senior management team (SMT).

2.18 The school's staff development programme outlined within its SDP, is focused on several important and appropriate whole-school priorities, including the further development of ICT, differentiation of the children's work, Linguistic Phonics, improving standards in literacy and assessment for learning. The teachers are very willing to share their interests and expertise in year groups and across key stages. To embed the culture of self-evaluation, it is important that the school's management team extend this process through the further development of the co-ordinator's role to include classroom observation and the evaluation of the quality and consistency of the children's learning experiences. The school's management team are well placed to take forward this area of work during the current review cycle, leading to the creation of the new three year SDP.

2.19 The staff work hard to create an appropriate learning environment for the children, however, the accommodation, has a number of deficiencies. Over time, minor works and refurbishment have helped to alleviate some of the problems and the teaching staff have made best use of the accommodation to create an interesting and attractive learning environment. The school is accommodated in a number of separate buildings and the inspection has identified health and safety issues, which are highlighted in an appendix to this report.

3. CONCLUSION

3.1 The strengths of the school include the:

- the quality of the pastoral care provision;

- the quality of the children's work in mathematics and the very good standards they achieve;
- the effective use of ICT to support the children's learning in mathematics;
- the standards of teaching observed during the inspection;
- the effective links established with the parents and the wider community that promote successfully the children's learning and development; and
- the effective management of the school by the Principal, ably supported by the Vice-principal and SMT.

3.2 The area for improvement includes the need to:

- develop further the arrangements for monitoring and evaluation to include classroom observation of children's learning, to promote consistency in the quality of the children's learning experiences.

3.3 In the areas inspected, the school has important strengths in most of its educational and pastoral provision. The inspection has identified an area for improvement which the school has the capacity to address.

No follow-up inspection is required.

The school's progress on the area for improvement will be followed-up by the District Inspector.

HEALTH AND SAFETY MATTERS

- There is an urgent need to conduct a risk assessment of the access and security arrangements of the school buildings and the school site to ensure the safety of the children and the staff; and
- The current accommodation requires urgent updating of the secure entry and door-locking system.

ACCOMMODATION

- The accommodation, in general, is not in line with the requirements of the DE building handbook; this impacts negatively on the school's ability to develop further the quality the pupils' learning experiences.

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