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*The Education and Training Inspectorate -
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**Department of Education
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INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

Education and Training Inspectorate

Report of a Focused Inspection

**Iveagh Primary School
Rathfriland**

Inspected: March 2008

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Iveagh Primary School is situated on the outskirts of Rathfriland, County Down. The children come from the town and the surrounding area. The enrolment of the school currently stands at 238; in addition, eleven pre-school children are enrolled in the reception class. Approximately 16% of the children are entitled to receive free school meals.

1.2 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 a group of children from year 6. One hundred and seventy-three questionnaires were issued to parents; approximately 42% were returned to the Department of Education (DE), of which 27 contained additional written comments. The Education and Training Inspectorate has reported the findings from the questionnaires to the Principal and the governors. At the meeting with the governors, they expressed their appreciation of the commitment and hard work of all the staff, as well as the very positive ethos that exists in the school. The children talked appreciatively about the school and indicated that they feel happy and safe.

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 team 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 staff, under the effective leadership of the Principal, have worked very hard to create a positive ethos, and an atmosphere of tolerance and mutual respect for all. Working relationships at all levels are excellent. The teachers make good efforts to meet and provide for the different needs of all the children. The behaviour of the children is exemplary; they are respectful of their teachers and of one another, and courteous to visitors. The teaching and support staff work well as a team and the non-teaching staff make a significant contribution to the life and work of the school. The learning environment is attractive, bright and stimulating; the staff celebrate the children's work through, for example special assemblies, and they record the children's activities and achievements in displays in the corridors.

2.2 The school gives very good attention to promoting health and well-being, including opportunities for healthy eating and physical activity. There are effective programmes in place, for example water provision, encouragement of healthy breaks, and links with external agencies.

2.3 The children's experiences are enriched through a wide variety of extra-curricular activities which include music and sporting activities and also through links with other primary and post-primary schools. In addition, the children's learning and social development are enhanced through participation in educational visits, competitions and community events and, by the many visitors to the school. The children's views are sought

on a wide range of issues and this enables them to contribute to important aspects of the life and work of the school. The children contribute to selected charities and an appropriate emphasis is placed on the importance of caring for others in the wider community and, in particular, through the support of needy children in other countries.

2.4 The high quality of the arrangements for pastoral care and child protection is a significant feature of the school. The school has procedures in place which implement the guidance outlined in the relevant DE Circulars. The governors, staff, parents and children are 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.

2.5 The school is committed to maintaining and extending links with the parents and the wider community. Appropriate induction procedures are in place to welcome new teachers, classroom assistants, parents and children, and a range of information meetings, and a regular newsletter are provided throughout the year to encourage the parents to play an active role in the education of their children. The Parent Teacher Association plays an integral part in the life of the school; their valuable contribution helps to enhance further the experiences offered to the children.

2.6 During the inspection, most of the teaching observed was good or better and in 20% of the lessons it was excellent. In the best practice, the teachers used a variety of teaching approaches and provided a good balance of direct teaching and opportunities for the children to work independently in pairs or in groups. The lessons were interesting and differentiated to match the range of abilities of the children. The children co-operated readily with their teachers and with one another; they were enthusiastic, engaged and challenged. In addition, the teachers promoted the children's confidence, independence and self-esteem, and managed the learning effectively, offering praise and encouragement and providing opportunities for the children to talk about their learning and understanding.

2.7 In recent years the staff have concentrated on embedding and developing further the good practice initiated through participation in the Northern Ireland Numeracy Strategy, with emphasis being placed on the development of mathematical language, processes and mental maths. It is important that the staff continue to evaluate the impact which these developments have had on children's learning, and that they use this information to help identify future targets and to support continued school-based staff development in mathematics across the school.

2.8 There are many positive aspects to the mathematics provision within the school. The mathematics overview for each year group provides a useful framework within which the teachers create their medium and short-term planning. The medium-term plans identify clearly the intended learning outcomes for each topic, the differentiated activities and support for the ability range within each class and the ICT resources to be used to enhance learning and teaching. In the best practice the teachers record the extent and quality of the children's learning and use their observations to inform future planning. This good practice needs to be shared more consistently across year groups and key stages. In order to ensure consistency, progression and development in teaching and learning, it will be important for teachers to liaise closely within and across year groups.

2.9 In the mathematics lessons observed, the majority of the children displayed enthusiasm and enjoyment; they engaged co-operatively in whole-class and paired work, showed increasing independence as they worked on mathematics activities and talked confidently about their learning. In the best practice observed, the intended learning was set within meaningful contexts and the teachers built upon the children's previous knowledge. In addition, the teachers used a range of teaching strategies to address the children's learning styles; the lessons were well-paced and had an appropriate degree of challenge to meet the varying needs within the class and there was a good balance between whole-class, paired and individual work. In the less effective lessons, there was insufficient focus on the intended learning and opportunities were often missed to secure clear understanding of specific mathematical concepts and understanding.

2.10 In the foundation stage, the teachers place increasing emphasis on play-based learning; the children are developing appropriate mathematical concepts, skills and language through a variety of games, rhymes, activities and practical mathematics lessons. In the most effective practice they are encouraged to take time to think, to ask questions and to talk about their learning. By the end of key stage (KS) 1 the majority of children have acquired a sound understanding of basic shape, time, data-handling, weight, length and number.

2.11 As they progress through KS2, the majority of children continue to develop their knowledge and skills through a combination of well-planned practical activities, discussions and written work. They have the opportunity to collect, represent and analyse data, to interpret their findings and, in the best practice, to share it with the wider school community. The children engage in problem-solving and investigative mathematics; they are encouraged to set personal targets and to reflect on their learning.

2.12 Information and communication technology is used increasingly to support learning and teaching in mathematics. The teachers make good use of the data projector, overhead projector, computer programmes and websites in planning and providing for children's learning. At KS2 they are beginning to develop topic-related mathematical tasks that enhance their learning and further develop their ICT skills.

2.13 By the end of year 7 the majority of the children achieve an average or better standard across most areas of the mathematics programme. Some children achieve high standards in mathematics. Although the overall quality of the children's experiences in mathematics is good, the school would benefit from additional resources to support the developing practical approach to the teaching of mathematics across the school.

2.14 The school uses a variety of formal and informal assessment procedures to monitor the children's learning. The outcomes of end of KS data are thoroughly analysed and benchmarked in order to inform planning, teaching and learning, particularly in relation to developing processes in mathematics.

2.15 The children's work is monitored regularly; the teachers' marking is positive and, in the best practice, indicates how the children's work might be improved, in line with the school's marking policy. The school is working towards greater consistency in marking for improvement and target setting. Children's records, together with samples of their classwork are built up to provide an overview of progression in their learning. Parents are well-informed about their children's progress; two individual parent teacher meetings are held during the school year and an annual written report is prepared for parents.

2.16 The school has identified 42 (18%) children who require additional support with aspects of their learning. The teachers identify the learning needs of the children at an early stage through in-class observation, ongoing monitoring and through the use of diagnostic tests. They differentiate the learning activities to ensure that the children's needs are met and that they work at an appropriate level and pace.

2.17 The school places a strong emphasis on the SEN provision and monitors and reviews the effectiveness of the support provided for individual children through well-prepared and focused individual education plans and through tracking year-on-year progress against the appropriate short-term targets set. The school makes effective use of external agencies to support the teachers and to guide the programme of support. The majority of the children who receive support in reading and to a lesser extent, in numeracy, make good progress. The tasks set during the withdrawal sessions complement the very effective in-class support provided by their teachers.

2.18 The SENCO collaborates with the other staff and oversees and administers the whole-school support programme. She maintains good records of the children's attainments, their difficulties and progress, and there are good links with the parents, through, for example, regular review of their children's education support plans. All of the teachers have a good understanding of the needs of the children in their class and they use a range of helpful strategies to assist with teaching and learning. In addition to the in-class support and individual and small group withdrawal sessions, a daily occupational therapy session is provided for a large group of children. The classroom assistants provide helpful support for the children.

2.19 The Principal has been in post for seven years; he is well-informed about primary education and has been instrumental in leading major improvements in the work of the school and enhancing its standing in the local and wider community. A consultative approach to school development work over recent years has promoted and nurtured a strong sense of commitment and collegiality amongst the staff and the governors. The Principal sets high standards for himself, for the staff and for the children. He has a clear vision for the ongoing improvement of the school, the curriculum and the attainments of the children. The Vice-principal is an effective curricular role model and he supports the Principal very well in the leadership and management of the school and in ongoing school improvement. The staff are hard-working and committed to the children's education and welfare; they have worked together to put in place effective policies to guide and inform learning and teaching. The school has worked through a number of important pastoral and curricular initiatives; there is a high level of commitment from the co-ordinators and staff to continue to provide a supportive pastoral care environment in which the children's educational and social development are promoted and successfully met.

2.20 The school development plan (SDP) has been agreed by the staff and the governors; it helps to guide the immediate work of the school in relation to the priorities that have been set for the present school year. In its current format, the SDP does not fully comply with The Education (School Development Plans) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2005. The further refinement of the SDP has the potential to assist the senior management of the school and the staff to focus clearly on key strategies and targets, and to help them to plan, monitor and evaluate improvement more effectively.

2.21 The school's staff development programme includes a combination of school-based and external in-service training which has focused on pastoral and curricular areas. The Principal promotes a culture of inclusivity in the school and often extends the staff development programme in an innovative way to involve the governors and others involved in the work of the school.

2.22 The quality of the accommodation is satisfactory and the standard of caretaking in the school is excellent.

3. CONCLUSION

3.1 The strengths of the school include:

- the very positive ethos which promotes an atmosphere of tolerance, good behaviour and mutual respect for all and the attractive and stimulating learning environment which is used well to promote learning and to celebrate the children's work and achievements;
- the high quality of the pastoral care arrangements and the excellent working relationships at all levels, the exemplary behaviour of the children and their positive attitude to learning;
- the broad range of mathematical experiences and the high attainments of many of the children;
- the wide range of interesting and varied extra-curricular activities which enrich the children's experiences;
- the quality of the teaching observed that included 20% of lessons that were excellent; and
- the very effective leadership of the Principal who promotes high standards of education for the children in his care, and the hard-working Vice-principal and staff who contribute to the overall effectiveness of the school.

3.2 The area for improvement includes the need to:

- develop further the SDP in line with The Education (School Development Plans) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2005 in order to assist the senior management of the school and the staff to focus clearly on key strategies and targets, and to help them to plan, monitor and evaluate improvement more effectively.

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

The school's progress on the areas for improvement will be followed-up by monitoring visits, conducted by the District Inspector.

APPENDIX

- The school meals service is organised and managed by the employing authority, and not by the school. The Southern Education and Library Board needs to address effectively the concerns raised by some of the parents and governors in relation to the effective operation of the service in the school, over the lunch period.

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