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*The Education and Training Inspectorate -
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Education and Training Inspectorate

Report of a Focused Inspection

**Millington Primary School
Portadown**

Inspected: January 2009

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 SCHOOL CONTEXT

Millington Primary School is situated in Craigavon Avenue, near the centre of Portadown. The enrolment currently stands at 558. Most of the children come from the immediate locality and a small number come from the surrounding area. At the time of the inspection, approximately 19% of the children were entitled to free school meals and 25% of the children were on the special educational needs register. In addition, there are 40 children who have English as an additional language.

1.2 FOCUS

The inspection focused on the quality of the children's experiences in literacy and numeracy and the use of information and communication technology (ICT) in promoting and supporting learning and teaching. The school's arrangements for pastoral care, including child protection, were also evaluated.

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 a group of children from year 6.

One hundred and eleven questionnaires were issued to parents; approximately 61% of these were returned to the Department of Education (DE). Thirty returns contained additional written comments. The vast majority of the responses indicated a high level of satisfaction with the provision in the school. In particular, the parents highlighted the caring, happy learning environment, the very good balance between formal and informal education, and the hard-working Principal, teaching and non-teaching staff. In addition, they valued the regular communication regarding the curriculum and the day-to-day arrangements within the school. The small number of concerns that were raised in the questionnaires have been discussed with the governors and the Principal.

Twenty-one teachers completed the online questionnaire. Their responses were highly supportive of the work of the school.

The governors spoke very positively about the caring, inclusive ethos of the school, about the quality of the provision for children with additional needs and the dedicated, teaching and non-teaching staff. In particular, they expressed their appreciation of the Principal and of his commitment and continuous hard work in the interests of the children and their families.

In discussions held with the year 6 children, they spoke enthusiastically and positively about their experiences in the school, and about the support and care provided by the teachers and assistants. They also indicated that they feel safe in school and know whom to turn to in the event of a concern.

1.4 PASTORAL CARE

The quality of the arrangements for pastoral care in the school is very good. This is displayed through the exemplary behaviour of most of the children, the positive working relationships, the diligent efforts made by staff to inform the parents on key pastoral matters, the cognisance taken of the individual needs of the children, and the very caring, inclusive and supportive ethos throughout the school.

Effective care and consideration are shown in the provision for children with English as an additional language (EAL), with their well-being and support structures overseen by a teacher. A part-time teacher and classroom assistants take the children weekly in well organised, small groups to enhance their English language skills and to provide support in curriculum subjects and in pastoral care. The teacher with responsibility for the collation of EAL has produced useful guidance for class teachers in order to promote consistent practice and provision. Parental links are valued by the school and information sheets are available in Polish, Lithuanian and Portuguese. In addition, the school provides Home Culture classes for the children with EAL each Saturday morning.

1.5 CHILD PROTECTION

The school has satisfactory arrangements in place for safeguarding children. These arrangements broadly reflect the guidance issued by DE. There is a need for a further risk assessment to be carried out with regards to the policy for general admission to the school buildings.

1.6 HEALTHY EATING AND PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

The school gives very good attention to promoting healthy eating and physical activity, for example healthy breaks and ease of access to drinking water, which encourage the children to adopt healthy lifestyles.

2. ACHIEVEMENTS AND STANDARDS

2.1 LEARNING

Almost all of the children settle quickly to their work. They complete tasks co-operatively and show enjoyment in their learning. In the early years there is an appropriate emphasis on promoting independent thinking and learning. During the play sessions most of the children are actively engaged in their chosen activities.

The majority of the children make good progress in their learning. There are a number of children, however, who would benefit from more challenging learning tasks and activities in order to raise further their levels of attainment.

The analysis of the school's performance data indicates an improvement in the children's levels of attainment in mathematics over the past two years with children in key stage (KS) 1 and KS2 achieving a standard consistent with that of children of a similar age in similar schools. The analysis also indicates that a minority of the children in KS1 and KS2 attain a standard in literacy which is below that of children of a similar age in similar schools.

2.2 ENGLISH AND LITERACY

In the lessons observed, the children's learning experiences in language and literacy are of a satisfactory quality. The school's Literacy Action Plan prioritises appropriately the need to raise overall attainment and improve standards in line with the Northern Ireland (NI) average.

The teaching staff do not have a coherent view for how learning and teaching in literacy can be provided progressively through a child's seven years in the school. The senior management needs to define clearly the roles and responsibilities in the co-ordination of literacy throughout the school to ensure there is continuity and consistency of practice which is focused on raising standards.

In the foundation stage (FS) and KS1, activities such as the use of songs and rhymes promote the children's oral skills and help them grow in confidence. As they progress through KS2 the children's talking and listening continue to be supported through drama, group and paired work. By the end of KS2 most of the children can express themselves clearly and confidently.

In FS and KS1, the children are acquiring basic reading skills through the development of phonological awareness and experience of shared and modelled reading. Book areas are used to encourage the browsing and handling of books. Reading is further promoted by a 'Library Day' with a book borrowing scheme which is aimed at involving parents more in their children's learning. By the end of KS1, the majority of the children read with increasing confidence and enjoyment

In KS2, the children have regular opportunities to develop their reading skills through guided reading, class novels and library books; most can read with fluency and expression and can talk, with confidence, about their reading habits.

In FS, the children become familiar with different forms of print and experiment with informal mark making during play. In KS1, basic conventions such as simple sentence structure and letter writing are developed through shared writing activities, writing frames and work sheets; in year 3, the children are encouraged to attempt joined-up writing. In response to its own analysis of test results, the school has purchased commercial schemes to enhance the children's grammar and comprehension skills in both key stages. In the samples of work made available during the inspection there was evidence that the children have opportunities to write for a variety of purposes. In year 7, there were also examples of good extended writing across the curriculum.

2.3 MATHEMATICS AND NUMERACY

In the lessons observed the children's learning experiences in mathematics and numeracy are of a satisfactory quality and in most cases they are good.

The co-ordinator provides effective leadership. She supports and advises her colleagues in the day-to-day implementation of the programme and monitors and evaluates the children's mathematical learning through, for example, classroom visits, sampling of books and analysis of data.

There is a suitably broad programme which provides the children with appropriate experiences across each area of the mathematics curriculum. The children are systematically developing mathematical concepts and skills through a combination of practical lessons and games. In the best practice, they are encouraged to articulate their thinking processes and have the opportunity to use their mathematical knowledge in meaningful contexts across the curriculum. In year 3, for example, as part of a topic on homes, the children used venn diagrams to record their investigation into the types of houses they live in; in year 7 the children have used a range of mathematical skills to investigate lung capacity and pulse rates.

In KS1 and KS2, classes for mathematics are organised on the basis of ability. In most of these classes the teachers work effectively and enthusiastically to ensure that the children are motivated and kept on task; they provide opportunities for the children to develop their mathematical thinking through activities which involve problem-solving and investigations. In nearly all classes the teachers need to differentiate further the learning activities in order to challenge the more able children and to raise their levels of attainment.

In most classes ICT is used effectively to support learning and teaching in both literacy and numeracy, with teachers making good use of interactive whiteboards, computer programmes and websites. During the inspection, the KS2 children were using the internet for research purposes alongside dictionaries and thesauri.

The year 7 children have successfully participated in the Council for Curriculum Examinations and Assessment ICT Accreditation scheme. By the end of KS2 most of the children are confident and proficient in the use of ICT.

The ICT co-ordinator has identified the need to develop a system for tracking the children's ICT skill development from year 1 to year 7 and to further develop her role in monitoring and evaluating role. The Education and Training Inspectorate (Inspectorate) endorses this as an appropriate area for development.

3. THE QUALITY OF PROVISION FOR LEARNERS

3.1 PLANNING

There is significant variation in the quality of planning within and across literacy and numeracy.

In nearly all year groups the long-term planning for numeracy is effective, providing an overview of curriculum content for the year and detailing learning intentions, strategies and appropriate mathematical language. In the best practice these plans are translated into useful medium-term planning which is continually reviewed and amended to guide practice.

The current format for long-term planning in literacy is content driven. Those with responsibility for this area of learning need to update both the long-term and medium-term planning in order to focus clearly on learning intentions and success criteria and to reflect the requirements of the NI Curriculum.

During the inspection there were some examples of evaluations undertaken by the teachers being used effectively to inform future planning. This good practice needs to be disseminated more widely with a clear emphasis on learning.

In the early years, the teachers need to plan more collaboratively in order to ensure progression in the children's learning, particularly in the play programmes.

3.2 TEACHING

During the inspection, the majority of the teaching observed was good or better. In the most effective practice the teachers used the learning intentions and success criteria effectively throughout the lesson to focus the children's attention and to consolidate their learning. In the less effective practice, the lessons lacked pace, there was insufficient challenge for the more able children and the teachers' closed questioning styles created limited opportunities for the children to provide extended responses.

In the early years, the teachers need to review the classroom organisation and routines in order to exploit more fully the learning potential in the activities and to ensure that the adult interactions with the children are more effective in extending the children's learning.

3.3 ASSESSMENT

There are appropriate procedures and records for keeping the parents informed about their child's progress. These include written reports and formal parent-teacher consultations. In addition, the parents are encouraged to meet with the teachers, both on a formal and informal basis, to discuss their child's educational and pastoral needs.

The teachers mark the children's written work regularly. In the best practice there is effective marking for improvement. This good practice needs to be implemented more consistently across the school.

The school uses a suitable range of standardised and non-standardised testing to assess the children's level of achievement in English and mathematics and to identify areas for development. The school has identified the need for more effective use of the analysis of this performance data to inform the short-term planning for learning and teaching, and to raise further the standards of attainment in English and mathematics. The Inspectorate endorses this as a key priority to promote improvement.

3.4 SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS

Approximately 25% of the children in the school are on the special educational needs register and over 5% of the children have a statement of special educational needs. The special educational needs co-ordinator organises the special needs provision within the school with skill and care, ensuring that a range of diagnostic tests are used to identify children's literacy difficulties, and that appropriate contacts are maintained with educational psychologists and therapists. The Vice-principal, a part-time teacher and a learning support assistant provide very well for the children through a system of individual or small group withdrawal sessions. Specialist teaching strategies are used very effectively to develop further the children's reading, spelling and writing skills through enjoyable activities. The children attend well and show enthusiasm for their support sessions. Progress is made by all of the children, with some making considerable gains in their literacy skills. The class teachers differentiate work skilfully in some cases, and the classroom assistants support very effectively the children with special needs within the classrooms.

4. LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

4.1 LEADERSHIP

The Principal has been in post for 20 years. During this time he has provided dedicated service to the school and the wider community. He has guided the school successfully through many changes in education and has been instrumental in establishing the strong commitment to pastoral care which contributes significantly to the education and welfare of all of the children. He is ably supported by the Vice-principal and senior teacher.

The governors have identified appropriately the need to review and develop the middle management roles and responsibilities within the school. The Inspectorate endorses this as an urgent priority in order to ensure a more equitable sharing of responsibility and a more consistent, strategic approach to the development of all areas of the curriculum.

4.2 PLANNING FOR IMPROVEMENT

The school's development and planning process is inadequate. Whilst the School Development Plan (SDP) identifies a range of appropriate priorities for development within a one year period, there are important areas for improvement identified which need to be addressed promptly in order to meet fully the requirements of the School Development Plans Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2005. These include the need to identify the school's priorities for development over a three year period and to specify the arrangements for the governors, in consultation with the Principal, to monitor and evaluate progress against the SDP. The management team need to formalise and further develop the self evaluation and monitoring procedures within the school in order to evaluate more strategically the quality of learning and teaching and to inform the SDP process.

5. CONCLUSION

The strengths of the school include:

- the very good quality of the pastoral care arrangements;
- the very good quality of provision for children with additional needs and for those with English as a second language;
- the good or better quality of teaching in the majority of the lessons observed;
- the strong and effective links established with the parents and the high standing of the school in the local community;
- the exceptional behaviour of most of the children; and
- the commitment of the Principal, the teaching and non-teaching staff, to the care and well-being of the children;

The areas for improvement include the need to:

- develop a more strategic approach to self evaluation and school development planning in order to plan for, implement and evaluate the impact of developments designed to bring about improvement;
- review and develop the roles and responsibilities of middle management; and
- develop further strategies for differentiation in order to challenge the more able children and to raise their levels of attainment in literacy and numeracy.

In most of the areas inspected the quality of education provided in this school is satisfactory; the strengths outweigh areas for improvement in the provision. The inspection has identified areas for improvement in teaching, leadership and management which need to be addressed if the needs of all the learners are to be met more effectively.

The Education and Training Inspectorate will monitor and report on the school's progress in addressing the areas for improvement.

HEALTH AND SAFETY

- The security of the classrooms, corridors and access areas around the school needs to be reviewed as a priority. A further risk assessment of these areas should be carried out.

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