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*The Education and Training Inspectorate -
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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

Mitchell House School
Belfast

Inspected: June 2007

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STATISTICAL INFORMATION (SPECIAL SCHOOLS)

- 1.1 i. **School: Mitchell House School** iii. **Date of Inspection: 04.06.07**
ii. **School Reference Number: 131-0016** iv. **Nature of Inspection: Focused**

1.2

School Year	2002/03	2003/04	2004/05	2005/06	2006/07
Total Enrolment	77	81	72	64	71

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: 80+
- 1.4 Average Attendance for the Previous School Year: 82%
- 1.5 i. Number of Teachers in School: 11.5 on Outreach Programme: 1
(including the Principal and p/t teachers)
(f/t equivalent = 25 teaching hours)
- ii. PTR (pupil/teacher ratio): 6.76
- iii. Average Class Size: 8
- iv. Number of Classroom Assistants: 18
- v. Ancillary Support:
Number of Hours per week:
Clerical Support: 36
- vi. Percentage of children in receipt of free school meals: 38%

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Mitchell House School is situated in the Holywood Road area of Belfast and provides education for pupils aged three to 18 years who have physical disabilities.

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 with two groups of pupils. Approximately one-third of the parental questionnaires issued were returned to the Department of Education (DE) and 12 of these included a written comment. All of the parental responses were very positive and supportive of the work of the school. At the meeting with the governors, they expressed their strong involvement in the school and outlined clearly their commitment to its management and development. In discussions with the inspection team, the pupils spoke very appreciatively of all the staff in the school and indicated that they were aware of the procedures for sharing any worries about their care and well-being.

1.3 The focus of the inspection was on the quality of provision to meet individual needs and the arrangements for child protection and pastoral care.

2. ACHIEVEMENTS AND STANDARDS

2.1 Mitchell House School is a very good school with strong and effective leadership. A notable feature is the high quality teaching with its emphasis on providing the best quality experiences for every pupil in the school. The senior pupils benefit from the worthwhile and appropriate focus on accreditation and all pupils gain from the emphasis on promoting personal independence, social and life skills.

2.2 The school places priority on developing communication, self-esteem and confidence and the pupils demonstrate positive attitudes towards their work. There is a warm and welcoming sense of community and, despite poor accommodation, the staff provide a rich and varied range of activities and experiences for the pupils.

2.3 There are strengths in the programme for the promotion of a whole-school approach to healthy eating, for example, the promotion of healthy breaks, water provision and cookery for senior pupils. Opportunities are provided for the pupils to participate in a range of physical activities and they demonstrate a good understanding of the importance of making healthy life choices.

2.4 The inspection findings indicate the following strengths in achievements and standards:

- the high levels of motivation and interest displayed by the pupils who clearly enjoy being at the school and make substantial gains in their personal and social development, language and communication and other learning across the curriculum;
- the responsiveness of the pupils and their interest in, and perseverance with, the tasks set;

- the promotion of the pupils' overall health and well-being throughout the school;
- the good quality programme for transition and leavers;
- the increasing focus on vocational education for senior pupils and the enthusiastic, positive approach to implementing new curriculum initiatives;
- the well focused and relevant individual education plan targets; and
- the clear analysis and monitoring of external exam results and the flexible approach to seeking appropriate accreditation.

3. QUALITY OF PROVISION FOR LEARNING

3.1 The teaching was of consistently good quality, with approximately 70% of the lessons judged to be of good to outstanding quality. These lessons were characterised by good planning which reflected the needs of the pupils, appropriate individual outcomes and very effective assessment.

3.2 The broad and relevant curriculum includes a wide range of appropriate specialist areas, and incorporates the imaginative use of information and communication technology (ICT) to enable the pupils to access learning and to enrich their experiences. The effective multi-disciplinary work contributes significantly to the pupils' development.

3.3 There are many strengths in the quality of the arrangements for pastoral care and child protection. The school has procedures in place which implement the guidance outlined in the relevant DE Circulars and has identified appropriately a few minor areas for improvement which it is currently addressing. The reappointment of a permanent school nurse would reassure parents that the complex medical needs of the pupils can be met effectively within the school.

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

- the extremely positive, welcoming and caring ethos which permeates the life of the school, celebrates success and creates an environment conducive to learning;
- the courteous, polite behaviour of the pupils;
- the high expectations of the staff and their commitment to promoting the highest possible level of pupil achievement;
- the good quality planning for learning which addresses the differing needs and learning styles of the pupils;
- the high quality of most of the teaching, some of which was outstanding and the imaginative, well prepared and resourced lessons;

- the strong sense of team-work between the adults and the pupils, and the positive way in which the senior pupils encourage and support each other and the junior pupils;
- the quality of the range of experiences in ICT, including the good use of assistive technology to enable curriculum access for all;
- the valuable contribution made by the school's technician in supporting the work in ICT;
- the strong emphasis on the creative and expressive area of the curriculum to support and enrich the learning experiences of all the pupils;
- the good progress made in literacy and numeracy;
- the staff's commitment and flexibility in providing the wide range of subjects within a broad and balanced curriculum;
- the effective use of digital profiling to document assessment in years 8 and 9 and the plans to develop this further;
- the staff's in-depth knowledge of the needs of individual pupils and their skill in providing appropriate support;
- the consistency across the school in the maintenance and sharing of information and the very comprehensive and meticulous planning, record-keeping and assessments for each pupil; and
- the effective inter-disciplinary collaborative working between teachers, classroom assistants and therapists, evident in the planning and sharing of information, which provides invaluable support to the pupils' learning and development.

4. LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

4.1 The leadership and management of this school is of high quality. Whole-school planning is child centred, focusing on the social, emotional, physical and educational needs of each pupil. The long serving Principal, ably supported by the acting Vice-principal, is providing clear strategic leadership with consultation. The school's own self evaluation has identified accurately its strengths and areas for improvement which this inspection endorses fully.

4.2 The inspection findings indicate the following strengths in the leadership and management:

- the strong and effective leadership provided by the Principal, ably supported by the acting Vice-principal;
- the hard work of the acting Vice-principal who has contributed much to developing the curriculum across a number of areas;

- the commitment of the Principal and staff to the provision of high standards and to meeting the needs of every pupil;
- the clearly defined school development plan and the clear roles and responsibilities for staff;
- the good start made in developing further a culture of self-evaluation in all aspects of the life and work of the school;
- the staff development programme which shows strong commitment to utilising the expertise and skills of each member of staff; and
- the well informed, committed and supportive governors who are fully involved in the work of the school.

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 clear strategic leadership provided by the Principal, ably supported by the acting Vice-principal;
- the consistently high quality of most of the teaching;
- the extremely positive, friendly, caring ethos which permeates the life of the school and the courteous, polite behaviour of the pupils;
- the breadth and balance of the curriculum and the innovative use made of ICT, for example, in digital profiling;
- the good quality of the broad and relevant curriculum in which many specialist subjects are offered through the efforts of a flexible, committed and hard-working staff;
- the good standards in literacy and numeracy achieved by the pupils and the appropriate accreditation opportunities;
- the very good quality of the school's programme for transition and leavers;
- the very good multi-disciplinary co-operation between teachers, classroom assistants and therapists as they plan and work together; and
- the strong support of the parents and the governors for the work of the school.

6. **CONCLUSION**

6.1 In the areas inspected, the school has major strengths in its educational and pastoral provision. The educational and pastoral needs of the pupils are being well met. The parents can have confidence in the school's capacity for sustained self-improvement.

No follow-inspection is required.

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