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INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

Education and Training Inspectorate

Report of a Focused Inspection

**Rathore School
Newry**

Inspected: October 2007

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Rathore School is a new, purpose-built school on a spacious site situated on the outskirts of Newry, County Down, which provides education for pupils, aged three to 19 years, with severe learning difficulties. Four of the teachers in the school are newly-appointed and following beginning teacher or early professional development programmes.

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 groups of pupils from the secondary department of the school. Of the 105 questionnaires issued to parents, some 40% were returned to the Department of Education (DE) and 21 contained additional written comments. The very small number of concerns raised by the parents was discussed with the Principal.

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

2. ACHIEVEMENTS AND STANDARDS

2.1 Rathore School is a very effective school with many good features enabling the pupils to achieve well and, where appropriate, to gain external accreditation for their learning. The pupils achieve high standards through an enriched curriculum and good quality experiences. As the pupils progress towards transition to adult life, they gain self-esteem and self-confidence from the opportunities provided by the school to develop life skills and independence. The pupils are well behaved and polite and display considerable empathy and caring attitudes to their peers within the school.

2.2 The school gives very good attention to promoting health and well-being, including opportunities for healthy eating and physical activity. There are appropriate policies and programmes in place, for example water provision, the 'Boost Better Breaks' initiative and healthy eating displays in the canteen, which encourage the pupils to adopt healthy lifestyles.

2.3 The inspection findings indicate the following achievements and standards:

- the pupils' consistent attainment of individual educational plan (IEP) targets;
- the healthy lifestyle choices made in school by the pupils;
- the pupils' ability to work well individually, in groups and as a class;
- the courteous, well mannered and confident pupils who display positive attitudes and a sense of enjoyment to social and academic learning; and
- the pupils' assured responses to, and participation in, the good quality transition process opportunities both within the school and the wider community, including the Southern Regional College.

3. QUALITY OF PROVISION FOR LEARNING

3.1 There is a very high quality ethos in the school in which pupils are cared for and supported and where their success and achievements are celebrated. The Principal has set clear targets for the consistent improvement of learning and teaching practice within the school. The teachers and classroom assistants are hard-working and committed to the education and well-being of the pupils and have high expectations of them. The members of staff know the pupils well and respond appropriately to their needs and interests. Classroom management is good; well differentiated teaching and communication approaches enable the pupils to work and communicate effectively with their peers and staff. The teachers plan IEPs appropriately, and identify achievable learning targets, including topics of interest for the pupils. In most of the lessons observed the quality of teaching was consistently good or better. Information and communication technology (ICT) is used well and, in some cases, skilfully and imaginatively; the sharing of this expertise should be disseminated further throughout the school.

3.2 A specialised sensory curriculum has been developed by the school, based on thorough assessment by therapists and staff of the specific sensory needs of the pupils. The resulting class programmes are used daily in well structured sensory physical education lessons. The school reports fewer pupil behavioural incidents since the introduction and consistent use of these programmes.

3.3 The quality of the arrangements for pastoral care and child protection in the school is excellent. The school has procedures in place which implement fully the guidance outlined in the relevant DE Circulars. The governors, staff, parents and pupils are fully aware of the school's procedures and have had the opportunity to contribute to a range of effective policies which guide the work of the school. Among the strengths are the high quality of pastoral care provision with the strong and effective leadership of the teachers with responsibility for pastoral care, the very caring and supportive ethos, the contribution made by the support staff to the pupils' well-being and their learning experiences, the effective ways of communicating with parents and governors, the policy and procedures for addressing bullying issues and encouraging good working relationships, the high priority given to the health and well-being of the staff and pupils and the effective communication and work with other agencies.

3.4 The main strengths of the quality of provision for learning are:

- the positive working relationships amongst teachers, classroom assistants, pupils and outside agencies;
- the detailed planning by teachers based on a thorough knowledge of the pupils and focusing on their individual needs;
- the well resourced and suitably differentiated teaching approaches, including the good use of visual strategies used by classroom staff which clearly address the pupils' learning needs;
- the frequent practical work with well-planned opportunities for extending fine, gross motor, communication and social skills;

- the introduction and skilful use of a sensory curriculum to meet the needs of the pupils;
- the skilful use by some teachers of interactive whiteboards to interest, motivate and stimulate the pupils' learning;
- the effective monitoring of pupil progress throughout the school by the school leadership team and curriculum co-ordinators;
- the high expectations of teachers regarding the pupils' behaviour and achievements; and
- the regular parent/teacher diaries which make good use of a variety of ICT and visual strategies.

4. LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

4.1 The Principal demonstrates excellent strategic leadership and shows strong commitment and dedication to the future development of all aspects of the school. He has established and developed strong links between the school and the local community. The newly constituted leadership team ably supports the Principal in establishing and developing the management roles, practices and procedures in the school. A good start has been made in establishing a school culture of self-evaluation which could develop further in order to raise the standard of teaching and learning through the observation and dissemination of the examples of very good quality and innovative practice in the school. The school improvement process is clearly linked to a well-constructed school development plan (SDP). There are very good opportunities for consultation about the SDP within the school community; the good quality staff development programme in the school is clearly linked to the aims of the SDP. Policies and programmes are in place which effectively support the work of the school. The school gives very good attention to and meets fully the requirements of the Education (School Development Plans) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2005.

4.2 The main strengths of the leadership and management of the school are:

- the commitment of the Principal to promoting the highest standards of ethos, care, teaching and learning within the school;
- the robust collaborative approach to leadership and to the development of a shared vision for whole-school improvement;
- the strong involvement and commitment of the governors to the work of the school;
- the orderly, systematic, well managed and established school routines;
- the effective establishment and development of links throughout the local community which broaden and benefit the pupils' experiences;
- the careful monitoring of teaching and learning planning and practice by the

school leadership team and curriculum co-ordinators; and

- the detailed and clearly defined SDP.

5. **OVERALL EFFECTIVENESS**

5.1 The overall effectiveness of the school is consistently good.

5.2 The main strengths of the provision are:

- the positive ethos and constructive working relationships between staff and pupils throughout the school;
- the good quality teaching which develops the pupils' learning, skills and self-esteem;
- the innovative sensory curriculum leading to improved pupil relaxation and behaviour and the emphasis placed on promoting health and well-being by the school;
- the pupils' attainments in accredited courses and in behaviour, social and life skills;
- the well structured monitoring systems used throughout the school; and
- the excellent leadership of the Principal and the active involvement of the governors in the running of the school.

6. **AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT**

6.1 The inspection findings indicate that the following areas for improvement need to be addressed:

- the need to develop further the school's self-evaluation processes; and
- to disseminate further the innovative teaching and learning expertise throughout the school.

7. **CONCLUSION**

7.1 In the areas inspected, the quality of education provided in this school is very good. 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-up inspection is required.

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