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**Department of Education
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INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

Education and Training Inspectorate

Report of a Focused Inspection

**Sacred Heart Primary School
Dungannon**

Inspected: October 2007

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Sacred Heart Primary School is situated on the outskirts of the village of Rock, some five miles from Cookstown in County Tyrone. The school serves the immediate rural community; just over 90% of the children travel to school by bus. The enrolment has decreased slightly over recent years and currently stands at 96. Seventeen percent of the children are entitled to 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. Sixty-one families were issued with questionnaires; approximately 65% were returned to the Department of Education (DE) of which 12 contained additional written comments. The responses from the parental questionnaires highlighted the caring ethos and the high regard in which the school is held by the community. At the meeting with the governors, they expressed their appreciation of the hard work and commitment of the staff and the Principal. The comments made by the parents have been shared with the governors and the Principal.

1.3 The inspection focused on the quality of the work in English and the use of information and communication technology (ICT) in supporting literacy. The inspection also evaluated the school's procedures in relation to pastoral care, including child protection.

2. THE QUALITY OF THE CHILDREN'S WORK

2.1 A major strength of the school is its strong sense of community. The staff have established a happy, supportive atmosphere which promotes a caring ethos, based on mutual respect at all levels. The children are confident and courteous; the standard of behaviour both in and out of class is exemplary. It is evident that nearly all of the children enjoy their time in school and are well-motivated and engaged in their work; this view is supported by comments from the parents and the children. The learning environment is bright and stimulating; examples of the children's art, written and topic work, photographs and evidence of their achievements are displayed and celebrated throughout the school.

2.2 The Principal and staff know the children well. Working relationships at all levels throughout the school are excellent. The school secretary, caretaker, classroom assistants and all other support staff contribute significantly to the life and work of the school. The school is well-maintained to high standards of cleanliness.

2.3 The school offers a wide range of extra-curricular activities including a cookery and needlework club. The children have opportunities to perform music, song, and drama. Sports activities include, Gaelic football, hurling, netball, gymnastics and swimming; good links with a local sports club ensure that the children have access to playing pitches when competing in inter-school events and competitions. These and other activities including educational visits, help develop the children's social, personal and interpersonal skills.

2.4 The quality of the arrangements for pastoral care and child protection in the school is very good. The school has procedures in place which implement fully the guidance outlined in the relevant 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 effective policies

which guide the work of the school. Among the strengths are the excellent working relationships throughout the school, the highly effective reward system which encourages and acknowledges positive behaviour and the children's achievements, the valuable use of Circle Time to help the children to develop their interpersonal and social skills and the effective ways of communicating with the parents, including the very informative parents' notice board situated in the school entrance.

2.5 The school's programme for the promotion of health and well-being has important strengths. Attention is paid to the development and implementation of healthy eating and physical activity programmes, for example the positive encouragement of healthy food choices, access to drinking water throughout the school day, and opportunities to try a wide variety of fruit, vegetables, breads and unfamiliar foods, which encourage the children to adopt healthy lifestyles. The few areas for improvement identified include the need to incorporate an assessment of the nature and the quality of arrangements for health and well-being practices within the school in the School Development Plan, and avoid any potential for presenting conflicting nutritional messages across the school day.

2.6 Three out of the six teachers have a composite class with two year groups. This places demands on them in terms of planning, monitoring and evaluation of the work across the different year groups. The teachers are extremely hard-working and conscientious. The quality of the teaching observed during the inspection was always good, with a significant minority of the teaching being very good. Teachers used a variety of teaching strategies, including effective group and paired work. The sharing of the intended learning outcomes with the children provided a clear focus for the lessons and in the best practice there were suitable opportunities for the children to reflect on what they had learned at the end of the session.

2.7 The school places an important focus on the development of the children's talking and listening skills. The teachers, and other adults in the classroom, use a wide variety of well-planned and creative strategies, to encourage talking and listening and to develop language across the curriculum. The children are given opportunities to ask and respond to questions with their peers and with teachers. In the best practice the children report on their learning through well-structured plenary sessions. In key stage (KS) 1 the teachers make good use of questioning and children are encouraged to express their feelings and opinions in a safe environment. In KS2 the children have the opportunity to make presentations with the use of ICT and digital images to audiences beyond the school. The children's talking and listening skills are well-developed; they are effectively linked to their reading and writing activities and promoted and used in other areas of the curriculum.

2.8 Reading is promoted and developed well throughout the school; the children display an interest in reading and they enjoy books. In KS1 the teachers make good use of Big Books and phonological awareness to promote the recognition of unfamiliar words, understanding and engagement with text. By the end of KS1 all of the children are reading at a level at least equivalent to their age. In KS2 the children engage with a variety of fiction and non-fiction texts and are encouraged to extend their reading through the use of the class and school libraries. The school monitors and tracks the children's standards in reading through the regular administration of standardised tests which indicate that most of the

children at the end of KS2 are reading at a level at least equivalent to their age and there is clear evidence of year-on-year improvement. The staff, under the leadership of the literacy co-ordinator, are currently revising the reading programme to ensure increased coherence and progression throughout the school; a recently introduced reading partnership programme has been beneficial for the children.

2.9 The school has identified creative and expressive writing as a focus for development and the staff are exploring strategies to allow the children opportunities for extended independent writing. The children's learning has been enriched through the opportunity to meet and discuss creative writing with a local author. The standard of presentation of work is very good and the children have experience in writing in a range of forms and for a variety of audiences. Throughout the school the children use dictionaries to support their writing, often without the prompting of the teacher. The teachers are making good use of ICT to support and enhance the learning of the children in literacy through the effective use of interactive whiteboards by both teachers and children in KS1 and KS2.

2.10 The children's experiences in play-based learning, in the foundation stage and KS1, contribute well to their personal and social development. The children are developing and using a range of skills through regular sessions of play. The teachers and support staff create good opportunities for language and number development and encourage the children's social skills as they work with one another. During play the children are enabled to make choices, share ideas and participate in role-play planned around themes, which allow the children to explore and consolidate their learning. Effective plenary sessions and recorded observations ensure the monitoring of individual children's progress through play.

2.11 The school has identified around one-fifth of the children as requiring additional support with aspects of their learning. A comprehensive policy guides the special educational needs (SEN) programme, including the provision of well focused staff development. The children's learning needs are identified at an early stage through classroom observations and the use of screening procedures and diagnostic tests. The special educational needs co-ordinator, the SEN teacher and the class teachers collaborate to write appropriate education plans which identify support strategies and targets to promote improvement. The teachers and classroom assistants support the children very well; work is differentiated and generally well-matched to each child's ability level. Appropriate links are maintained with the parents and with external support agencies.

2.12 The children's progress is monitored through the effective use of a wide range of assessment data to identify trends and set appropriate targets for improving further the children's standards. The school has developed a very helpful marking policy to guide and inform the teachers and parents. The teachers mark the children's written work conscientiously, often annotating it with supporting and encouraging comments; in the best practice the comments also indicate how the work could be improved. The parents have regular opportunities to meet with the teachers to discuss their children's progress; written reports, detailing each child's achievements are sent home annually.

2.13 The Principal has been in post for 12 years. He is hard-working, and committed fully to the life and work of the school. He sets the tone for the excellent working relationships throughout the school; in addition he has engendered a very strong sense of team-work and has the support of the governors. The Principal communicates effectively, has a clear vision for the school and is well-supported by his staff in the management, teaching and day-to-day work of the school. He combines well his leadership role and that of classroom teacher.

2.14 The school's process for school development planning has many strengths. The school has identified appropriate targets for improvement including aspects of literacy and ICT and has consulted widely with parents, teachers and the children on a variety of school improvement matters. Effective policies are in place to guide and inform the work of the teachers and parents. The school's targets are clearly defined and related to staff development opportunities. The school has identified a few minor areas for improvement in order to meet fully the requirements of the School Development Plans Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2005.

3. CONCLUSION

3.1. The strengths include:

- the climate of mutual respect displayed by all, both within the school, and the local community;
- the integration of talking and listening, writing and reading throughout the curriculum to support the children's development of literacy;
- the children's motivation and engagement in their learning;
- the continuing development of ICT to support and enhance the learning;
- the support given to children with particular learning needs; and
- the effective leadership of the Principal, his commitment to the education and well-being of the children, and his ability to foster professional relationships at all levels.

3.2 In the areas inspected, the quality of education provided in this school is very good. The educational and pastoral needs of the learners are being well met. The parents/local community can have confidence in the school's capacity for sustained self-improvement.

No follow-up inspection is required.

APPENDIX

HEALTH AND SAFETY

- There is no secured access on the doors to the main school building at the rear of the school and to the mobile classrooms.

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